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A HANDBOOK OF THE DRAMA

ITS PHILOSOPHY AND TEACHING

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WITH A CHAPTER

On the Law of Copyright in its relation to Dramatic Works

BY

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THE ROXBURGHE PRESS

3, Victoria Street
Westminster

[1895]

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PN 1661
C6

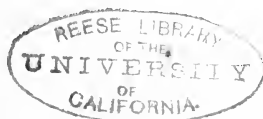
A
HANDBOOK
OF THE
DRAMA



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TO
SIR HENRY IRVING,
The most popular Actor of his time,
THIS WORK IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY THE
AUTHOR.

PREFACE

THIS work is an endeavour to put forth certain facts which the author believes will be of advantage and utility to the embryo dramatic author, critic and playgoer. His information has been gained partly from experience, both as a dramatic critic and as a student of the Drama, and partly from works of sufficient authority upon the subject to warrant their views being quoted.

The author is indebted for much valuable information contained in "Hennequin's Playwriting" and other works of a similar nature, which he now comprehensively acknowledges. His best thanks are due to Mr. Edmond Browne, who has been kind enough to contribute the chapter upon the law relating to the copyright of plays, which brings to a conclusion what the author has tried to make both practical and intelligible.

P. J. C.





A

HANDBOOK OF THE DRAMA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE remarkable progress which has, within the last half-century, been made in all branches of the drama is a subject which will well repay close and critical examination. There has never existed any department of art so closely allied to Nature and her varying conditions of existence as that of the drama, in its connection with the actor's art, and with the analysis of the passions and emotions of the human soul. Knowledge concerning the development of this subject, to be gleaned at all, must be gleaned partly through the pages of dramatic literature, and partly through our personal contact with the theatre. And knowledge of this kind is distinctly valuable, because it embraces much of the hidden mechanism by which the mind is regulated and affected. The extensive metaphysical elaborations which have, from time to time, occupied the genius of speculative enquiry, have been the means of placing before the student of psychology the intricate operations of the mind, as its workings have been reduced to a science.

But we very much doubt whether, in the whole range of intellectual research, much has been added to the already accumulated store of learning, which places us any nearer a satisfactory understanding of our mental organisation. The exact sciences, which are very few, give us, like mathematics, deductions which, when once established, are perfectly plain, and afterwards invaluable in many other occupations demanding the exactness of definite calculations. But the philosophy of the mind, as it is expounded in our text-books of metaphysics and psychology, often leading us into a labyrinth of endless suppositions, places our conjectures at last upon mere hair-splitting deductions, which in the end lead us to no literal conclusion. The mind is ever altering and changing its course. Like a vessel in all the vicissitudes of the tempest, it is tossed about from one point to another, veering into channels which only augment the confusion. The scientific mind, although beginning upon a basis of established laws, gradually relapses into the unlimited region of speculative enquiry. Each and every successive school discovers faults and fallacies in the doctrines and reasonings of its predecessor. The science of the mind is speculative, contradictory and unsatisfactory. Far different, however, is the analysis of the mind as it gives birth to the passions and the emotions of the soul. Art may here begin where science left off. Where a proposition may have been infinitely beyond the power of the scientist to expound, the artist may take up and develop it into an engaging and refining thesis, embodying in itself the beautifying influence and fascinating charm of our own better nature. The mental

exercise occupied in the conception of our own natural state, of our own poor limitations, of our own digressions and spasmodic endeavours, may perhaps be condemned upon the threshold of scientific enquiry as empirical and vacillating; but it is none the less valuable, for all that.

The drama occupies a foremost place in the long gallery of those semi-scientific studies which reflect upon their surface the secret emotions which the world has ever experienced. It is, perhaps, the only one of all the arts which is confined within narrow limits, and yet seems inexhaustible in the universality of its treatment. It has the whole of human nature to study, certainly; but the whole of human nature is a volume of no very great dimensions. Human nature, in all its varying and fluctuating conditions, is hemmed in by the one definite sphere of individual action. It is rather in the contrasting of one individual nature with another, which gives to the drama, and to all the other imaginative arts, the essence of this universal scope. Hence the dramatist has difficulties to contend against far greater than are to be found in any other mental occupation. He has to give to every successive generation a new phase, or a new complexion to an old one. [The novelist has not the same fundamental obstacles to contend against. He perceives Nature in detail only; the dramatist has to examine Nature, not only in analysis, but also in synthesis. The mediocre story-teller who enhances the interest of his narrative by a newly-discovered theory of morality, or shadows society by the exposition of its worst elements, may

succeed in creating a great, perhaps a profound impression, with his novel; but the dramatist requires materials far more engrossing for the foundation of a play which is supposed to be a reflection of the same social state. Give a thoroughly good novelist, and an equally good dramatist, the same materials, and the same opportunities of making the best of them, and the probabilities are that the novelist would succeed where the dramatist would utterly fail. The possibilities are quite unequal in both cases. In other words, the human nature of the novelist and that of the dramatist are altogether different. It may be said that this is only ostensible, and not real. That it may seem, because the performance of the one is read, and that of the other is seen and critically examined in its progress. But the same emotions are not influenced in a similar manner during the gradual unfolding of the novelist's plot, and during the same operation attending that of the dramatist. The powers which belong to the one and to the other may be equally distributed in their work, but they may be, and they really are, displayed to different advantage. We believe that the work of the dramatist is greater than that of the novelist. The scenic effects which are often given as an argument in favour of the novelist do not imply a refutation because the effect of scenery is only momentary—the effect of words is lasting. The power of description, in a word, which the novelist possesses, is his chief attribute, a power which the dramatist does not use, and, in fact, can never use, except to the detriment of his work.



THE DRAMA

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Notwithstanding this and many another disadvantage, the dramatist has a wide area at his disposal if he chooses to open up new phases of individuality. Indeed, we think the dramatist, to succeed, must open up new phases, for the old ones are fast fading away. New epochs have been added to the drama all along the line of its literature, and these epochs have, in their turn, differed widely in the method of their exposition and enunciation.

The history of the drama is surrounded by no obscurity, and if we give, in a manner necessarily hasty and imperfect, a brief summary of its career, we think we shall not be doing so without a purpose. There is, to the student of the drama, a delightful library in which to enrich his mind, and in which he may learn the story of mankind as it is told in our literary annals. To the student so inclined, the following pages may be the means of bringing him a step nearer the examination of a subject which is one of the most fascinating in the whole range of literature.

All art, in its initial conception, is associated with religion, and, in some cases, with the rites of the early Christian Church. If this has been so with the first beginnings of such arts as music, painting, and literature, in a more restricted sense, it is most emphatically the case with the drama. Some amount of discussion has been indulged in to show precisely in what sense the drama owes its origin to the Church, but we think we shall best meet the wishes of our readers if we give simply the established facts known to all who have attempted to consider the matter upon independent and

unbiased grounds. We have abundant evidence to show that, at a very early date in the Christian era, dramatic works, in the shape of comedies and tragedies, were enacted for the purpose of instructing the people in some of the great Christian and Biblical truths. From the sixth to the ninth century there appeared works which clearly prove that the drama was found to be a practical means of exemplifying not only episodes in the Scriptures, but also imaginary views held by their respective authors, upon side issues of Scriptural knowledge, which lent themselves freely to an open discussion in dialogue. There were imitations, too, of the ancient classics, but these did not in any way foreshadow the dawning of the modern drama, which was to be signalled by a far different process. The literary ignorance of the people made it necessary that they should be instructed by some tabular or pictorial means, and it was evident, from their character, they preferred that which was romantic and spectacular. The priests and monks found that one of the best means of imparting knowledge to the people was by speech, and if that were ornamented and assisted by additional accessories, the effect would be proportionately heightened. Consequently, what have now been designated Mysteries or Miracle Plays were introduced to the people. Rising directly out of the rites of the Church, these performances had the absorbing fascination of reality. The crowds which gathered to view those performances were filled with the joy or the sorrow of the object depicted. Occasionally, a play was enacted which had as its plot the presentation of the joys and the sorrows of the hereafter. The cele-

brated performance entitled "The Harrowing of Hell," although not written till the reign of Edward II., offers an excellent example of the style which then obtained with the populace. The title of this work contains its purport. It was a presentation to awe the masses into a better code of morality while here, instead of forfeiting their inheritance in the world to come by persisting to do evil.

The Church discovered then, and endeavoured to perfect what, indeed, the modern stage has only recently succeeded in perfecting—the government of the imagination and the other faculties in scenic display. The Church understood that, by regulating the several influences that co-operate in the final conquest of the senses and lay the heart bare to impressions of good, it would best succeed in making man better acquainted with himself. It saw, too, that what was really present before the visionary gaze was not sufficiently strong to move the intelligence, and that effect, to be great, must be rather suggestive than substantive. Hence the imagination of the people was first heated by friction with outward objects, from which they inferred a development in proportion to the strength of their imaginations. Pictures illustrating epochs in the lives of eminent saints were frescoed upon the walls of churches, in order to bring the worshippers into a more personal and concrete relationship with the attendant thoughts and circumstances of the Divinity. As the preacher dwelt upon the Passion, he exposed to the view of the excited multitude a picture of the Saviour expiring in agony on the Cross. If the eloquence of the preacher failed to influence them, the pictorial illustra-

tion caused them to sink upon their knees and implore forgiveness. This was found to be so successful, that it was considered advisable to take a portion of the sacred text and expand it into the form of a dramatic performance. According to Ulrici, on high festivals narrative hymns, such as the so-called sequences and *prosæ* (i.e., representations from the lives of the saints), were introduced into the liturgy, and accompanied by representations in the form of *tableaux vivants*. On Good Friday, a crucifix was erected, round which the priests assembled and recited Christ's Passion in alternating chants; after which, amid funeral lamentations, the crucifix was placed in a kind of grave below the altar. On Easter Sunday, however, it was again brought forth, and the Resurrection was celebrated. This rite, distinguished as the *passio, sepultura et resurrectio*, was called a *mysterium*. Soon the three Marys and the angel were added—the former to anoint Christ's body, the latter to inform them that He had arisen from the dead. Then the other principal characters—Christ, Mary and John—were entrusted to certain persons, who had only to say or sing the words belonging to the different characters. Subsequently, the coming and going of the various persons introduced the first beginning of an action; a number of groups were formed, and life and motion were given to the picture. Lastly, the persons representing the different characters received dresses adapted to their parts; mimicking and gestures came of themselves, and the result was a *dramatic mysterium*—a religious *play*.

These representations gradually became transformed into the actual drama, and laid the foundation of the

succeeding system of dramatic plays, which, at the end of the eleventh and at the beginning of the twelfth century, formed so characteristic a part of the French literature. The French appear to have been as susceptible as any other nation in the eagerness with which they cultivated the drama as it was given them in the ecclesiastico-dramatical studies of the clergy. France was, indeed, influenced more than any other country by the fascination of the representations, which gradually became associated with the national recreations of the people. The importance of the Mysteries as a powerful stimulant to the devotion of the populace was soon felt in Germany, Spain and England. Gradually, as events became dramatised, and as this method of instruction grew more and more popular, the laity were allowed to take part in the representations, and the vernacular was substituted for any foreign element which may have crept into the performances. The people were first of all allowed musical responses only, but as the institution increased in the estimation of the people, they were given parts to sustain, which they did in their own language. Subsequently the Latin was altogether omitted, and preference given to the vernacular. The musical portion of the play, which had hitherto formed so conspicuous a part of the performance, was omitted for the introduction of the more imposing art of declamation. The plays now began to assume the aspect which the drama, in its proper sense, has since retained—it was rhetorical instead of musical. Previously, musical arrangements and responses were the chief attractions since mere eloquence had been abandoned; now, when



the drama was formed and systematically represented, music was made an adjunct to the declamatory and rhetorical passages, which constituted the chief portion of the acting drama.

The time was rapidly arriving when the drama was to become an institution of the people, and when the clergy were to relinquish all claim to its maintenance. In 1210, Pope Innocent III. prohibited the clergy from taking any part in public performances, and forbade any drama being acted in the churches. And now, when the drama was given freely over to the community as their rightful property, it soon developed into an amusement which, in spite of the want of balance and proportion in the plays, was cherished as a great national boon. Carnival plays, masquerades and spectacular plays were introduced with every attending circumstance of success. As the ecclesiastical influence gave way to that of the laity, the drama assumed its definite aspect, and treated of popular subjects instead of the biblical Mysteries which had hitherto occupied its attention.

After the Mysteries came the Morals, or Moral Plays. These plays, which arose about the middle of the fifteenth century, mark the second epoch in the history of the English drama. They bear a strong resemblance to the Mysteries, for the very sufficient reason that they were a further development of them, and were in many respects similar to them, with this exception, that the secular element was altogether paramount, and the purely ecclesiastical altogether subservient. The Moral Plays were in great request during the reigns of Henry VI. and Edward IV., and down to the time of Henry VIII. they

retained their character as popular representations, with very few and unimportant changes in their literary composition and structure. They were dramatic plays, in which allegorical figures—personifications of general moral forces—appeared as dramatic characters, developing, in a symbolical representation, the ideal contents of the Scriptures as understood from this moral point of view. Gradually, however, the link between the Mysteries and the Moralities became loosened, until, in the end, it was completely severed, and the Moralities—by moving freely and independently in their department, as upon territory of their own—dramatised the whole sphere of morals in all its relations to the daily realities of life in its symbolico-allegorical forms, and without any regard to a religious basis.

The mode of representation generally still remained the same as in the case of the Miracle Plays. The stage was, doubtless, still devoid of all scenic decorations, and merely draped with tapestry. The dresses, even if occasionally rich, were, nevertheless, freely chosen, the dramatic personages being characterised only by distinct emblems. However, in the fifteenth century, professional players, who, in an imperceptible, or, at least, an unaccountable transition, had proceeded from the *homines vagi*, i.e., jugglers, dancers, puppet showmen, &c., appear to have become a very numerous class. And as Moralities were very frequently given as interludes on the festivals of princes and the nobility, we may assume that with these the drama passed more and more from the hands of the clergy, of the *confréries* (a band of earnest individuals who

organised themselves for the purpose of charitable and pious works), and of the leading companies, into those of the itinerant bands of players. As early as the year 1465, on the occasion of the marriage of a relative of Sir John Howard, afterwards Duke of Norfolk, a company of players gave a dramatic performance which was very likely a species of Moral Play. This is the oldest known example of those theatrical representations which, at a later period, were performed so frequently in the residences of the English aristocracy.

As the drama had been at first influenced by the Church and by the rites of religion; as again, several centuries afterwards, it had been influenced by the people and by their anxiety to take part in the dramatic performances, which gradually became a national institution, so, too, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the British drama was operated upon by the prevailing development of the nation, which then assumed so striking a factor in the succeeding epochs of dramatic literature. The commencement of the Tudor period was the beginning of memorable changes in the history of the English people. The impending struggle which was overhanging the Church and State; the awakening energy and intelligence of the people; the introduction of printing and its attending consequences; the opening up of new maritime provinces; the conquest and annexation of hitherto unknown lands—all these circumstances tended to add new life and vigour to the already progressive and prosperous state of the people. The profuse liberality of Henry VIII., whose whole life was one round of amuse-

ments, sought to give every impetus to an art which was rapidly becoming the popular entertainment of the people. Henry VIII. raised, considerably, the dignity of the actor by employing his services at Court for the purpose of assisting at all great functions by means of his art. He engaged several companies, and treated them with characteristic liberality. It now became the fashion to employ companies of actors whenever a noble gave an unusual display of his opulence; and, accordingly, the drama was fostered and upheld not only as a great national recreation, but as one of the polite refinements of society. The actor, naturally desirous of grandeur, wished to see his dramatic presentations clothed in a becoming garb of magnificence, and, accordingly, scenic effects were introduced which to us would now seem childish and absurd, but then appeared to be exquisite illusions, rivalling, in their splendour, fairyland itself.

Yet another notable feature was introduced about the same time. Until the sixteenth century the comic element had been omitted, doubtless because it had not been associated with the instincts of religious solemnity. Now, however, when the religious complexion was disappearing, and the more conventional scenes of domestic life were quickly gaining notoriety in dramatic representations, the people recognised the absence of anything which contributed to their amusement. The want was soon met by the free introduction of humorous dialogue. The comic phase, in the initial stages of its development, in all cases, naturally moves principally within the lower strata of human society; it

appears at first rough and outspoken, even to rudeness, and the grotesque is its favourite garb. Hence, coarse comic scenes from common popular life form the subject in which it most delights to express itself. In addition to this, it must be remembered that, as already remarked, the life of the people at this time was acquiring a greater importance, an inner restlessness and animation, and demanded consideration on the part of princes and the nobility. Lastly, it lay in the general character of the more recent times, not only to oppose a more practical, worldly, and realistic tendency to the idealism of the Middle Ages, but also to question the prevailing ideas, the ruling powers, and the transmitted institutions, as to their justification and validity—a tendency which at first always appears in the form of the comic, in the garb of parody and satire, because they and the comic, in their nature, are one and the same thing. For the comic, of course, is the very natural opposite of every exaggerated sublimation of the mind, the sworn enemy of fantastic ideals, as of all thoughts and opinions that are opposed to actual life; it is the contemplation of actual conditions and relations in the light of this contrast. But the character of the more recent times possessed the principle of individuality—the right of asserting the living personality against the decaying institutions of the Middle Ages, against the feudal state of hierarchy, as, indeed, against the tyrannical system of corporations, which had become mechanical, and in which the individual living man was only employed as the lifeless part of a machine. Henry VIII. was a monarch who stood, as a man and

king, at the extreme point of this contrast; following entirely his own caprices and personal desires, he spared neither the traditional claims of the Church, nor the rightful and political institutions of the State—neither arbitrary assumptions nor well-founded rights. This opposition to the spirit of the Middle Ages appears at first under the protecting veil of the humorous.

All these endeavours, desires, and requirements could not be satisfied either by the ancient Miracle Plays with their limited and ever-repeated subjects, nor by the Moralities with their stiff seriousness, their cold allegory, and their diffuse and abstract generalities. It required a new form, a new kind of conception and treatment of the dramatic material. A new species of dramatic performances was, accordingly, introduced, known as Interludes. Although these plays were decidedly childish and pantomimic, they yet presented the comic element in the character most admired by the audiences who witnessed them. The characters introduced were generally of a limited number, sometimes only two or three. The plot consisted for the most part of a quarrel, in which blows were frequently exchanged, much to the delight of the spectators. The most notable feature in these plays was, of course, the comic relief, which did much to make them popular; but their literary merit cannot be said to have been great.

The Reformation in England did much to promote the growth of the drama, and we find the subject treated to some extent in nearly all the dramatic works of the period. Whole plays are often devoted to an examination of the causes of the contention between the two

parties, and there are few plays which do not make some kind of allusion to the contest with the papacy. In this way the drama partook largely of the historical genus, whilst the allegorical and religious were altogether eliminated. This period may be regarded as the point of transition to the regular drama. The succeeding epoch immediately preceding the reign of Elizabeth and the age of Shakespeare deserves consideration only as it affects the dramatic style adopted by the Elizabethan writers. That age was prolific and valuable because of the impetus it gave to every kind of writing.

It was most valuable from a literary standpoint, because of the impetus it gave to dramatic writing. The most remarkable contrast which exists between the drama of this and the preceding age is the systematic clearness with which the action was sustained. There is a distinct individuality in all the dramatic works which then began to flow from the writers of that period, which exhibit a strength and depth of vitality which had not hitherto been recognisable. Action is the very soul and sustenance of the drama, and it is by the onward current of the action that the body and blood of the drama are nourished. From the very commencement the English drama possessed this great characteristic, but up to this time it had been in its embryo state, undeveloped and hardly existent. Now, however, it grew rapidly, and became the one mark by which dramatic literature was then distinguished. In the English drama, nowadays, there is, perhaps, a disposition to regard action as the chief element in the composition of the play, and the other ingredients are, in many instances, left untouched,

or else made a means of furthering "the main action," as it is commonly called. This may be, and frequently is, carried too far, at the expense of the primary object of the dramatist's function—to give power and energy to his conceptions. [Dramatic characterisation is often rendered cold and unsympathetic by an abnormal development of the progress of the play, without an accompanying allowance of that individuality which, when skilfully introduced and blended with the action of the play, produces and engrosses the attention, the sympathy, the co-operation of an audience.] Unquestionably, action and individuality are two of the most important objects of dramatic construction; at all events, if these are omitted, or treated in a slipshod manner, the result cannot be otherwise than crude and unreal. The care of the author should be, we think, not to make the most of one of these elements, but to blend them with perfect assimilation, to give his characters an equal footing, the one with the other, to preserve in them the pervading form and colour which lives and moves around and about us in our own natural sphere.] Realism, indeed, is to the drama what imagination is to poetry, what colour is to painting, what perspective is to drawing, what life is to existence. It is the abiding emotion, if we may use the expression, of genuine feeling. Too many writers give us, from time to time, not only in the ancient drama, but in the drama as it is to-day, sketches of an unreal world, a somewhere to which they have never been and to which we can never go. Is it that all the old emotions of our hearts and souls are worn out by constant usage? Is it that we have become weary of

hearing and seeing ourselves as we are, and yearn for something outside and beyond us? We think otherwise. The fascination of life (if it possess any) is, we think, to see ourselves reflected, sometimes in others', sometimes our own children. And art succeeds only too well if it executes the reflection in a faithful representation. A just proportion must exist in the artistic conception of realism, and when it exists upon the stage its power is indeed great. Tell the father how faithfully he is reflected in his child; although he may be conscious of many faults, of many follies, yet he is pleased. Point out to him the resemblance of a feature, the colour of an eye, the characteristic of a walk, and you will cause an emotion, the purest, perhaps, of the human soul. Flatter the child, and you flatter the parent; praise the one, and you praise the other; insult the one, and you insult the other. It is thus that the broader arena of social life should be viewed, if it is to be viewed correctly. // Let us see ourselves represented in our drama—not the hobgoblins of the author's distorted and disarranged "genius," improperly so called, but natural and rational creatures, working out our mission in a consistent sequence of events. The drama will present to the earnest and thinking student many problems for solution. These are nearly always capable of almost infinite development, and in their working the dramatist and the dramatic disciple will find much to interest and much to inspire. The journey through life is made up of a series of endless exercises, which, if conscientiously worked out and applied to our own sphere of thought and to our own individual conduct, should bring us

into contact more closely and more directly with many of the fluctuating phenomena which continually agitate and enlarge the mind. The purely speculative circle within which most mental operations move cannot fail to be greatly benefited by contact with the prescribed teachings of our national drama. Then the impetus which has of late years been given to the study of our drama is a movement of considerable value to our literature, and the more the literature of our drama is fostered, the more deeply rooted must necessarily be the affection which exists between the various departments of science and art, because all science and all art are component parts of our literature, and our drama is an important element in our literature. It is, therefore, a step forward in the right direction when our drama has been recognised as an educational subject. At the Battersea Polytechnic Institute (if, perhaps, at no other institution of the same nature) the drama has been incorporated along with elocution as a subject for study by the members of the dramatic classes; and the zest with which students apply themselves to the pursuit of this kind of literature is a marked signification of the progress of our age in the cultivation of our literature.

The reception with which the last series of brilliant revivals of Shakespearean and standard plays at the Lyceum by our favourite actor, Sir Henry Irving, was most gratifying to all who take an interest in the literature of our classical drama. Sir Henry must have felt deeply gratified to feel that his old studies were as fresh and popular with his friends as ever. We owe

him a great debt of gratitude for all he has done for our national drama; but no one understands better than he does how high a value we place upon all the work he has done for the cause of our stage and for the future of our drama.

We have now arrived at that period in the history of the English drama which is the least known and the least understood. The age which produced Shakespeare produced a new world in letters, art and science. Every schoolboy knows the influences which worked this great change in our social and intellectual system; few educated people understand the causes which preceded those influences. We would gladly pursue this brief sketch down to the present day; but we think the history of the drama from the time of Shakespeare is already expounded by those who have better claims to its discussion than we. We shall feel content if anything we may have said will interest others to dip deeper into the chest of dramatic literature, from its initial conception by the Church to its final occupation among the fine arts and sciences, which are the mainstays of our civilisation, our comfort, and our prosperity.

CHAPTER II

THE SCIENCE OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM

THAT there should be some standard of dramatic criticism is a question upon which there need be no further discussion. The science of criticism is engaged equally with the examination of the drama and its surroundings as it is with the expositions of poetical effusions which ornament language and give value to its ingredients. There is a standard of criticism for music, painting, sculpture, and, in short, for all the fine arts; and that there should also be a basis upon which the drama may be examined requires no "argument or expostulation" to show. But the difficulty arises when the limits and aims of criticism come to be enumerated. It has been observed by an American author of some distinction that "we have in English no standard and, consequently, no scientific criticism." The remark is most just and appropriate, for English critics have certainly no particular basis or standard upon which to found or formulate their ideas. There is no reason, however, to suppose that the science of dramatic criticism should be arbitrary. On the contrary, it should be arbitrary only in so far as it should be consistent and relevant. The subject-matter of criticism may change, but the science itself should be unchangeable although progressive. It seems

difficult to expect that a science which is eminently progressive should be unchangeable; but when the word unchangeable is employed in this connection, it means not what is commonly regarded as unchangeable and arbitrary in a logical and strictly scientific sense, but what is unchangeable in the broad sense of the term. Criticism of all kinds will undoubtedly change and fluctuate according to the peculiar character of the critic, and the period in which he writes. But the essential matter, although not the form, will remain the same. Criticism will be empirical, founded on prejudice, fashion and taste, as long as the individuality of people varies.

[The essential elements which compose good criticism, and, therefore, scientific criticism, are generally accepted to be fairness, precision, simplicity, and a conspicuous knowledge of the subject criticised.] To expect an absolutely impassioned critique upon any work of art, whether it is the composition of a musician, or the three-act comedy of the playwright, is a point upon which many opinions, doubtless, would materially differ. For our part, we are inclined to believe that nearly all dramatic and other critics are prejudiced in one particular or another. This is casting no discreditable imputation upon their individual personalities. The criticism, in its particular reference to the criticised, is simply the expression of the critic's own ideas. Those ideas are, or should be, expressly his own, and embodied in his own particular phraseology. [They should be, if regarded in the light of originality, the honest endeavour of their author to place upon paper his impressions of

the thing observed, in a straightforward and conscientious manner, with as little divergency as possible. Many excellent and estimable critics are frequently influenced, not by the real object of the criticism, but by the author's own personality. Hence, in their criticisms, we often find personal allusions to an author of a play, which are as much out of place as they are impertinent. Any licence of this kind must always be looked upon as an index of the critic's mental infirmity and want of critical observation.

The German School of criticism is conceived as belonging to and being directly influenced by the imagination. This theory, in many respects highly valuable and artistic, is, at the most, impracticable and useless as a means of education, and as the educational influence and bearing of criticism is its fundamental office and employment, it therefore lacks a distinctive merit, without which it cannot be regarded as a science or based upon scientific principle. It has been repeatedly argued whether logic—which, in itself, forms the true foundation upon which the superstructure of all definite sciences is built—is itself a science or an art. The conclusion of the most eminent logicians is that it partakes equally of the nature of both a science and an art, and, therefore, exercises the influence allotted to each. But criticism cannot be regarded in the same light, for the simple reason that there are no principles upon which the critic can construct the matter of his critiques. The purely imaginative method of criticism, which, belonging to the Germanic theory, has been called *Æsthetic*, offers no scope to the critic by which he

may gain a knowledge of the ultimate art of critical conception. We know by what odd associations, both of cause and effect, the human mind is influenced. We know by what peculiar methods it arrives at conclusions sufficient to turn Locke and Mill round in their coffins. And as these vagaries are associated with the mind as a whole, and with the reasoning faculty especially, what can be said of their application to the imaginative faculty, by far the most uncontrollable of the mental phenomena? The imaginative method of criticism is valuable in so far as it is the means of placing criticism in a fanciful form; but we think it is specially injurious to the general reader, who may be ignorant of the first principles of the science. The perusal of imaginative critiques is as hurtful to the mind of the embryo critic as is the study of actors of mannerism to the young actor who has yet to learn the elementary rules of his craft. The Germans, who follow this theory of criticism, "make the sublime and beautiful either sensations and emotions, or simply objects of the sensibility; or, if they rise higher, they base their science of art on a defective and false conception of being, and give us nothing but scientific ignorance, hardly superior, if indeed equal, to the practical good sense of English and American critics."

The imagination and the critical faculty should be carefully cultivated and adopted by the critic who is desirous of giving his impressions in an intelligible manner. The most imaginative writers have frequently proved the worst kind of critics, because their judgment was influenced too forcibly by the imaginative faculty.



THE DRAMA

25

Matthew Arnold was a critical author of the first class. Carlyle was another of the same high order, and Macaulay may be instanced also. The critical faculty was so largely developed in those men that their imagination was made subservient to it. The generality of critics, however, evince a strong partiality for imaginative writing, and often clothe their descriptions and critiques in language abounding in metaphors and similes. The florid style of writing, so eminently distinctive of a juvenile writer or inexperienced author, is lavishly employed where a simple enunciation of facts would be far preferable. [The foolish habit which critics have of making their critiques of secondary importance to their literary style, is too plainly seen in many critical essays and newspaper articles which periodically come under our notice.] ?

The schoolboy generally first cultivates a wild, florid style of composition, using the biggest words he can find to express the simplest ideas. He chooses to substitute words and high-sounding phrases for ideas which have yet to come, and instead of plain facts and arguments set forth in proper sequence, he writes inflated eloquence "in vague, bombastic declamation, made up of those fine things which boys of fifteen admire, and which everybody who is not destined to be a boy all his life, weeds rigorously out of his compositions after five and twenty." [There surely requires no elaborate system of reasoning to show that criticism, and especially dramatic criticism, should be simple and unaffected, perspicuous and epigrammatic.]

The criticism of the ordinary newspaper reporter,

who is regarded in theatrical parlance as a "dramatic critic," does not pretend to any extensive knowledge of the British Drama. He goes to the theatre upon the receipt of the usual Press invitation, and is present upon the first night. His "copy" must be in the printer's hands as soon as possible, and his criticism generally occupies something like a column. Now, it has always appeared a puzzle to us how any critic can do either himself or his subject justice during the interval which elapses between his leaving the theatre and when the compositor receives his "copy." There certainly can be no time for dwelling upon the structure of the play in its relative value as a piece of literature. We do not think, indeed, that editors or newspaper proprietors have any partiality for lengthy or minute criticism; [they simply value the notice which they pay so-called critics to write as a *quid pro quo* for the advertisements received, and for which they are well paid.] No newspaper could well afford to dispense with the theatrical advertisements, which form so important a source of their revenue. The theatrical advertisement is regarded very much in the same light as the quack medicine—it pays well. It would never do to proscribe a big firm of patent medicine vendors, neither would it be journalistic enterprise to place upon the literary index the theatrical and music-hall advertisement. There is in the two parallel cases this difference, that the critic can crack up the play, where it would be regarded as provincial to refer at all to the quack medicine. We have invariably noticed, moreover, in papers not theatrical, that the theatre which gives out the most

advertisements, and pays the best price for them, gets the best and longest notice! We say this without the slightest fear of contradiction. Anybody who takes the trouble to peruse the critical columns of our daily and evening papers, will easily understand the force of our remarks. We do not say, and we do not mean to insinuate, that there are not conscientious critics, because we believe there are; but we certainly do say, and do firmly believe, that they are largely influenced by circumstances which have nothing, and should have nothing, to do with their criticisms. The influence of the Press is considerable, but only in a prescribed degree; and, until the critics and the editors come to a proper and conscientious understanding concerning the critical examination of plays, simply as specimens of a creative art, and not as mere hardware articles and objects of commerce, we shall continue to have an unhealthy system of dramatic criticism.

The critic should know and understand that criticism is a science and not a hobby—a thing to give him amusement, and act as an excuse for letting his hair grow abnormally long, and for his cultivation of effeminate manners and tastes. It is a definite and systematic department of progressive knowledge, which cannot be properly understood and appreciated unless rightly studied and applied. In music we have a far greater share of regular scientific knowledge than is displayed in connection with the drama; not because music is more scientific than the drama, but because the subject has been reduced by consistent study and application to a scientific basis, and examined from scientific principles.

The best critics of music are certainly musicians, and undoubtedly the best critics of painting are painters. It would be obviously impossible, not to say absurd, for anyone not acquainted practically with music to criticise the compositions of Mozart, Palestrina, Haydn, or Rubinstein. It would be impossible and absurd for anybody to criticise the portraits of Sassoferrato and the landscapes of Turner unless he thoroughly understood the blending of colours, the due effect of light and shade, the essentials of proportion and perspective. [It must also be impossible and absurd for anyone to criticise a play, whether it be a comedy, a tragedy, or a farce, unless he rightly understand the principles of acting and elocution, and has a thorough knowledge of stage effect and the history of the drama.] But should the critic who writes about the drama not understand these particular and fundamental principles of his craft, his criticism is nothing but what he thinks; his thought not being regulated by positive knowledge. Now, if it be granted that a dramatic critic should rightly understand his vocation in those respects which have been enumerated, it must be concluded that not many dramatic critics in London possess this indispensable knowledge. We, therefore, think that there can be no valuable criticism unless it be accompanied with the knowledge requisite to give it value. The mere summary of the plot and of the chief actors in a piece constitutes the criticism of the Press to-day; but such criticism, most emphatically, is unimportant and valueless.

The question may now be decided, whether or not

the dramatic criticism of to-day is valuable. If we use the word "valuable" in its literal and, therefore, its truly scientific sense, we should say that such criticism has no real value beyond the mere commercial value of advertising the play, and inducing people to go and see it. As a contribution to our literature, or as a means of instruction, it is not, and cannot be, of any value either to us or to posterity.

If it be allowed that dramatic criticism is a science or an art, it can be useful only when exact. No science or art has ever been useful when not based upon exactness and precision. The real value of a science rests mainly upon this quality. There can be no precision in a science if there be no accurate standard of that science. The gradual development of scientific inquiry has been successful only where research has accompanied the primary and governing law of natural truth. And the elements of accurate knowledge are the elements of natural truth. [Dramatic criticism, to be valuable as a portion of our literature, must then exist upon properly understood laws, which, although not arbitrary, are sufficient to guarantee accurate judgment.] A science certainly must exist, and proceed, upon carefully balanced principles, under whose guidance and influence it may exercise its discipline upon personal investigation. These laws, although in a certain sense limited to the particular science or art, may be applied to the co-operation of individual judgment and opinion, but both the judgment and the opinion should be under their control; these unwritten laws should not be under the personal control and jurisdiction of the judgment

and opinion of one man. The active and creative sphere of criticism exists upon the imaginative faculty as much as upon the purely critical faculty. They both operate in unison, and beat time to each other's judgment. Active criticism, apart from its characteristic as being a mental attribute not possessed by all, cannot be really taught by any hard and fast method. A youth may be educated for the medical profession, but he cannot upon a similar system be equipped for a critical functionary. [The science of critical analysis and synthesis is a mental accomplishment innate.] It may, and indeed should, be embellished and furnished by study, practice and observation. But all the study, practice, and observation in the world would not create the faculty if it were not naturally present in the mind of the critic. Therefore, to make a critic of an individual who is not mentally fit for the occupation, is an injustice to the public and to the critic. He will never excel, and the public can never be impressed. We are now considering criticism in its highest state of scientific perfection, not as a means of expressing one's ideas haphazard, and without fully understanding the actual subject criticised. The artistic and scientific basis of dramatic criticism is falsified and debased by the systematic prostitution of its office. We do not in the least intend, or attempt to set up, a critical apotheosis in an examination of the real nature of scientific criticism; our endeavour is simply to classify the plain signification of our initial proposition, that criticism of all kinds, and especially dramatic criticism, should be constructed upon scientific principles.

Apart from the mere personal application of journalism there is the immediate necessity of applying criticism in its scientific classification to the development and expansion of dramatic authorship. The future of the drama is, to a great extent, nurtured years before its maturity, and it is partly in the soil of judicious criticism that it obtains the sap necessary for its sustenance. The drama, in its dependence upon any separate epoch for its peculiar and distinguishing characteristics, loses in proportion as the critical faculty of an age is ill-used, or, what is the same, not used at all. The employment, and, indeed, the only legitimate employment, of scientific criticism, for none other is useful to the furtherance of literary excellence, is to assist, as much as possible, in the genuine advancement of the drama, as it forms an important portion of literature. Literature itself loses according as scientific criticism is withheld. The debasing influence exercised upon any department of literature by a mere semblance of genuine criticism must weaken rather than fortify the natural power of literary development. The equivocal or ambiguous employment of irrelevant comparisons, such as those which are too frequently made in fourth-rate evening newspapers and magazines, must tend to confuse not only the ideas of the unfortunate reader, but also the equally unfortunate author. Criticism cannot, in its scientific bearing, be reduced to a matter of pounds, shillings and pence. It cannot be manufactured at so much a yard. [The ordinary reviewer of books and the ordinary critic of plays do not really appreciate the value of criticism.] They value it just at the same price as the authors whose

works they examine, and that value is probably nil. Where the critic does not regard his vocation seriously, and where he does not show an intimate knowledge of his subject, the author cannot possibly entertain any serious regard for his critiques.

The simple praise or blame of any work, on account of the critic's own prejudice to any point in the dialogue, the narrative, or the style, counts for nothing unless that praise or blame is accompanied by adequate and sufficient explanation. The explanation, in its turn, must be clear and precise; otherwise the critic will commit one of the worst faults in literary style—the want of a close and accurate system of analysis. Frequent perusal of literary and dramatic critiques often displays the utter insincerity and technical ignorance of writers. They go gaily on committing fallacies and making absurd comparisons, for the purpose, it would seem, of filling up space and making columns out of nothing. Their excuse for this is often that it reads lighter, but surely this is but a lame excuse for bad criticism. If it is to be done at all, it should be done well, and with due regard to the systematic arrangement of the writer's ideas upon the author's work. As long as this remains undone, criticism will be, what, for the most part, it certainly is to-day, "stale, flat and unprofitable."

CHAPTER III

I.—AUTHORS AND CRITICS

THE successful playwright must necessarily possess so many intellectual and, perhaps, individual characteristics bearing directly upon his professional occupation, and these qualities must exist in such prominence and distinction that to classify them were simply to recapitulate the elements of those dramatic works which have so often placed men like Mr. A. W. Pinero, Mr. Sidney Grundy, Mr. W. S. Gilbert, and other successful dramatists, in the position in which they are to-day. These authors of plays have not attained success—and could not have attained success—by following any set programme, or adhering to any plan by which they have written their plays. An author, to be a success or a failure, must allow the slow process of Nature to develop his ability, if he possesses any; and should he have none of Nature's dramatic gifts, he had better leave the writing of plays alone, and devote his time and attention to more congenial and, therefore, profitable occupation.

There comes a time to most people when they feel, almost to suffocation, that they have been sent into this world for the express purpose of giving the fruits of their imagination to their fellows, and they usually follow out this inclination by perpetrating a novel or

a five-act drama. Now, this desire to obtain fame and fortune simultaneously may be productive of both good and bad results. The composition may be dreadfully bad, or it may be, happily, exceedingly good. It remains, therefore, a matter of conjecture whether an author's projected work will be a success or a failure, and to those who are thirsting to try their luck at dramatic authorship, the best course, perhaps, to pursue with entire satisfaction to themselves, is to apply themselves to the business and await results. If they fail, they will be all the wiser; if they succeed, they and their work or works will be gladly hailed by all who court the smiles of *Thalia* and *Thespis*.

We should, therefore, encourage all who have, or think they have, this desire, to go in and win if they can. There is plenty of scope for good dramatic authorship. We have waited too long and have been too often disappointed in our expectations. We have become tired and wearied out beyond endurance by adaptations from the French, and all kinds of other adaptations. Novels cut down and "arranged for the stage" by actors and authors, because there was nothing better to be had, have, from time to time, stopped the gap; and now, when actors and managers are crying out about there being nothing better at hand, it must mean, if it means anything, that good plays are scarce; that, in other words, the supply is not equal to the demand. Then, such being the case, sit down forthwith, and at once, if you have the inclination, my gentle reader, do what you can for managers and actors, who are going about, eating each other's heads

off, for a good comedy or a good melodrama, "like this or like that."

The dramatic author should, however, be particularly careful not to follow slavishly any definite play as a copy; nor should he allow his originality to be hampered by adhering to any method adopted in a successful play; and, when managers tell young authors to go and write a play like *Charley's Aunt* or *The New Boy*, they forget for the moment the guiding principle which governs public taste. A time will undoubtedly come when the public will be tired of such plays as these. Farce will always, of course, obtain a recognised position in our drama, but farce, like most other things, changes as time goes on. The comedy and the farce which Moore and Whitehead wrote differ from that which is written to-day as much as the sonnets of Shakespeare differ from Tennyson's "Maud." *The Gamester* and *Creusa* were received with just the same amount of success and approbation in their day as *The New Boy* has in ours, and a time will come when Mr. Arthur Law's clever play will be shelved for something quite different. Hence, the dramatic author who would rise to something beyond the mere scribble of farce should consult his artistic temperament, as well as the manager's anxiety for what he thinks will pay.

Dramatic writing of to-day has, in many cases, been reduced to a sorry and mechanical plight, and, were it not for one or two names which stand out in bold relief, one would be compelled to conclude that playwriting had been really played out.

It would be idle to argue, or even attempt to argue,

that the play that pays is the most welcome. We shall all readily admit that Mr. Penley and Mr. Weedon Grossmith would rather have *Charley's Aunt* and *The New Boy* "than anything," and this, just because these two plays have been the means of making these genial players' fortunes and adding considerably to their reputations. We are equally sure, however, that neither of these clever gentlemen would attempt to hold that these plays are "artistic productions"—we mean, of course, in the real acceptation of the term. They are much too sensible to think anything of the kind, and yet they would gladly risk other ventures such as these. But this risking "ventures like the last" has been proved again and again an unprofitable speculation, and many an actor and manager has turned the key in his theatre and walked home heartily sorry "he had ever touched it."

[Then do not, if you are at all inclined to write plays, take any particular play or work as your standard and model.] The critics are, sometimes, sharp fellows; and they are always on the look-out for anything in a play which will give them an opportunity for making good "copy." A critic, we have always noticed, is more ready to pick out the worst, or, at all events, the inferior portions of a play; the redeeming features being left for the audience to discover. They (the critics) are there ostensibly to analyse the play; but instead of bringing the cream to the surface, they usually, by a peculiar process of their own, present only the skim. This is bad criticism; and shows at once that the critic is either young at his business

or that he is unable to write a respectable amount of matter in a sufficiently interesting manner. We have noticed, too, that critics who have been at the business for a number of years, and who have become accustomed to the work, generally have prejudices of their own. They occasionally take a particular dislike, personally or otherwise, to an author; and no matter what he does, it is sure to be inferior. We have followed the critiques in one or two leading papers, just for the sake of satisfying ourselves upon this one point alone; and the result is a remarkably strong proof of our observation.

An author and a critic meet at an "At Home" or other festive (?) gathering, and they happen to talk about politics, science, religion, art. They differ; and thenceforth they are sworn enemies. The critic takes his revenge by ridiculing the author's next play. This is childish and, were it not an absolute fact, incredible. A critic may ridicule the way an author does his hair; he may smile at his fopperies and his weaknesses; but, because he does so, he has not the right to make fun of his play, and, moreover, to do so upon every possible occasion. The public easily see through this, and they derive no pleasure from it. Give every author his meed of praise if he deserves it; if he does not, but rather calls for censure, why then be a man, and let him down gently. Do not, if you are a newspaper critic, ^{or any other kind} be a snob. For goodness' sake do not go about with *Times* or *Telegraph* written upon your back! Keep the fact to yourself, and do your work modestly, and like a gentleman. Remember

(we conclude by this time you *are* a critic) that ten chances to one the author of the piece is a far more clever fellow than you are, and that probably, if you could do the same as he has done, you would be one of the first to attempt it. Critics, for the most part, are too apt to keep all their plums for the Pineros and the Gilberts; they forget that these will die out, and others will have to fill their places, and others will certainly not come if they are to be browbeaten and laughed at. There have been examples sufficiently numerous of plays which have outlived first-night criticisms, despite the scathing criticisms of first-night notices. This is at once significant, and would seem to imply that first-night notices are not absolutely trustworthy. In many cases they are far from being so, and we believe one prolific cause of this arises from the fact that critics rely too much upon the applause or censure which, at the outset, greets the piece. They are often influenced too largely by the vulgar verdict of the "gods," whose opinion cannot always be regarded seriously. The "gods" may have come to hear a screaming farce, and, instead, they get an insufficient and dull comedy. They are at once 'riled,' hurt, vexed. They are then demons of revenge, and forget, for the time being, all courtesy and all respect.

The critic, if he is desirous of accomplishing his duty well and faithfully, should treat the matter more scientifically, and discuss with himself the redeeming features of the play, and give his honest opinion of the work. He should not allow any falling-out between

his wife and that of the author, or one of the actors, to weigh too heavily in the balance of criticism; nor, again, should any friendship be a medium for extravagant idolatry and irrelevant eulogy. Critics are, not infrequently, very fond of hobnobbing together, and discussing the piece as it proceeds, and the result may be a general slaughter the next morning. The unfortunate author eagerly reads the papers, and finds himself and his play torn "to tatters, to very rags," and yet such a play may be a success.

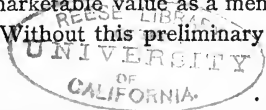
[Now-a-days, when so much confidence is being placed in young men on the Press, it would be advisable that candidates for the post of dramatic critic should possess a more or less thorough knowledge of the English drama.] The study of the drama has always been to us one of the most delightful intellectual luxuries. The perusal of the ancients gives body and substance to one's literary tastes. A good critic should understand and be able to appreciate the gradual development of the English drama from the period of the Passion Plays downwards; and he should, moreover, have a sufficiently close acquaintance with them to make analogies and draw comparisons. Yet, how is it? It is very doubtful if there are more than three or four critics upon the London Press who have any scholastic or literary knowledge of plays, in the comprehensive sense of the word. Mr. Clement Scott, Mr. Joseph Knight and Mr. William Archer we have always admired, because, as writers, we recognise in them accomplished students, not only of the British drama, but also of the Continental Schools.

The younger generation of critics, however, seem to

be, for the most part, in the clouds. They are hazy and equivocal, not to say apophasistic, in what they write, and, after dragging the reader through a mire of conjectures and idle comparisons, they leave him to fathom a mystery of ill-chosen metaphor and extravagant simile. Writing literary critiques upon any art or science is no child's play, and the person who attempts to do so should have all his wits and knowledge about him. Presence will not avail. He must either be master of the situation, or at once manifest his ignorance and incompetency. The critic usually prefers to adopt a middle course, and conceals his futility and want of knowledge under a misty fog of inflated jargon, which he dishes up at so much a line or paragraph. This is not criticism. It is simply *matter*, and matter frequently of a very inferior quality. The generality of newspaper critics do not, we are quite convinced, regard the profession in so serious a light as they might reasonably be expected to. We are not now going to indulge in any Utopian flights of what art is or is not. We prefer to be brief and plain, and it seems strange that where so much is said about the importance of upholding "art for art's sake," critics do not take a more serious view of the subject, and deal with the work of the profession more thoroughly. A physician has to understand the difference between paralysis and epilepsy; a surgeon is taught to distinguish the bones of the feet from those of the hand; and a lawyer learns the elements of his profession in the experience he gains in the Inns of Court. The dramatic critic, however, is allowed to vault over comedies and tragedies, and introduce his own personality into what-

ever haunt may be most agreeable to him, with an utter disregard of all modesty and all consequences. Certainly, things have changed somewhat since articles have been initialled or signed, and the critic has to mind his p's and q's more anxiously than formerly. But, even so, he still makes fraudulent efforts at hoodwinking the public by an ostentatious display of literary tinsel, which is but a poor substitute for the solid metal of competent criticism.

[The dramatic critic should acquire, if he acquires anything, an intimate acquaintance with the past and present history of the modern drama.] He most certainly should have read all the notable plays, and he should naturally possess the critical faculty. Now, it is not a great deal to require a knowledge of the subject-matter which one chooses to discuss, and when one discusses that subject for the benefit and information of others, that subject should be thoroughly understood. The chief plays in the British drama are not many compared with the notable works of fiction of other departments. [The old English school of comedy, introduced by Ben Jonson, Messenger and Ford, and other contemporaries, to the dramatists of the Restoration and the succeeding school, should be carefully studied.] Yet, among all the critics of the London Press, to say nothing of the provinces, how many know the subject in this manner? An art critic should certainly understand the principles of the art about which he speaks and writes, and so should a dramatic critic acquire the learning sufficient to give him a marketable value as a member of a profession of critics. Without this preliminary know-



ledge and experience of the drama, any ordinary intelligent person could do what is done by the so-called dramatic critics. They simply give the impressions of what they see and hear, and keep as much as possible within the limits prescribed by their editors. Under these circumstances the author can receive very little help from his brethren, the critics. He will have to depend solely upon his own judgment and the advice of his best friends, who give him their candid opinions, and who may, indeed, have a more profound knowledge of the drama than the "dramatic critics," so called.

Newspaper editors, managers and proprietors, if they acted judiciously, when engaging the services of a dramatic critic, would do well to make a few enquiries into the personal accomplishments of the would-be censor, and obtain from him satisfactory evidence of his knowledge of the subject upon which he is expected to expatiate, because now, when so much value is placed upon good dramatic criticism, newspaper editors will best consult their own interests by giving prominence to writing which must be read by a large section of the public. That writing should, therefore, be done well and conscientiously.

II.—COMEDY

THE most essential element in the composition of comedy is, of course, to be comic. There are various degrees of fun and comicality, and these change and fluctuate according to circumstances. The exhibition of real humour is usually associated with laughter, expressed either inwardly or outwardly. The laughter which is

outward, the laughter which is broad, and loud, and noisy, is usually only provoked by a spontaneous incident, and not generally by a succession of preliminary sallies which terminate in a complete climax. Both these kinds of risual exaggeration are produced by a variety of causes, and the effect may, or may not, be instantaneous. To a French audience, and, sometimes, to a British audience too, a man falling over another on the stage, because they were both looking in opposite directions, generally appears irresistibly comic, and meets with roars of laughter. The English are, however, a little more stolid, and prefer the "business" to be led up to, as in the case of *Charley's Aunt*, or *The New Boy*, which are by far the best comedies of the kind. An Irish or Celtic audience do not like tomfoolery. They prefer smart repartee and hidden subtleties and passages of wit, which an English audience do not always seem to relish or appreciate with the same amount of gusto. The American likes his comedy in good bold lines, with plenty of personalities and instantaneous triumphs of banter. This all means that people of different countries vary greatly in their appreciation of humour. And this difference, and this distinction, have given rise to the formation of various schools of wit and humour, which are so entirely different, the one from the other, that they require no minute classification to be recognised.

Wit and humour differ, again, at various epochs, and we readily perceive this distinction, not only in the study of Shakespeare, but also in that of authors of more recent date. The humour of *Touchstone* and *Pistol* is even different, the one from the other, but how much

more different is the wit of the Restoration drama from anything that had preceded or followed it. Society influences the drama in this respect more than in any other. The lewd, coarse humour which distinguishes the Elizabethan comedy from that of the succeeding generation bore the same resemblance as the generation which followed bore to the comedy of Wycherley and Farquhar. The bluntness had certainly disappeared, but something even more fatal had taken its place. The coarseness of the Elizabethan period had given place to the more hidden meanings of the Restoration, which, by competition and comparison, had been made quite shameless in their rendering. Farquhar vied with Wycherley in making *The Constant Couple* more suggestive than *The Plain Dealer*, and Vanbrugh wanted to outdo them both with *The Provoked Wife*, and they each succeeded admirably, after their respective desires. They studied their audiences, and found that, to please them, they had to be extravagant, and to be extravagant then was to be licentious, and licentious and immoral they forthwith became. The history of the morality of England during the next hundred years after the Restoration of Charles II. is told in the history of our drama, and the history of the British drama during that one hundred years is the best criterion we have of the state of society as it then existed.

In treating of the drama under the Restoration—that is to say, from the accession of Charles II. in 1660—it is well to understand the condition of society in England at this particular time. From 1534, the date of the Reformation in this country, to the death of the Protector,

the drama underwent many important and characteristic changes in its structure and development. These changes were, however, those which were brought about by the varying conditions of the people. The dramatic productions intended for performance had to be written to suit the public taste, and whoever was most successful in pleasing the people was surest of success. During the period of the Tudors the drama flourished, during that of the Stuarts it underwent many vicissitudes and changes. Under the Stuarts restored, it again flourished from the pens of Wycherley, Congreve, Farquhar and Vanbrugh. Now, it is somewhat important, if not essential, to briefly examine the causes which tended to produce the effect which we are about to discuss. The state of England at the time of the Restoration is only fully understood after examining the state of its literature. Recollect that the drama was first of all associated with the beginning of Christianity; it, therefore, played an emotional part. It continued to be employed as a useful medium for instructing the people for many centuries; it, therefore, played a valuable part in the education of the people.

At an eventful time in the progress of the world's history, it became disunited from the Church at the command of the Roman Pontiff. When a social and religious revolution was beginning to loosen the chains which fettered the minds of men, the drama had the fostering and devoted care of the intelligent, the opulent and the great. But it was destined to lie dormant and inactive during a period of suspense, agitation and revolt, during a period when plans of campaign, arsenals and political intrigues were found to be far more absorbing than

three-act comedies or five-act tragedies. But this epoch, too, had to give place to another, not so abundantly eventful, perhaps, in the intricacies and subtleties of constitutional law and legal history, but which was prolific of those minor oscillations in the inner life and workings of little societies, that mark an era in our literary annals, which constitutes a delightful relaxation from the endless negotiations for peace, the counter conflicts of rival partisans, the bitter anguish of dethroned and murdered princes, the hazardous game of individual despotism, and the nervous disquietude which is the result of political factions and follies. Thus England had passed through a great intellectual, religious and social ordeal; an ordeal, indeed, which, although fearful in its attendant circumstances, was, nevertheless, the only means which great politicians could suggest to reform and regenerate the nation. After this ordeal was passed, and a new generation was blossoming into maturity, Charles II. returned from exile and ascended the throne to be a witness of, and take an active part in, the effect which we shall now hasten to discuss.

The primary and initial matter in connection with this period, which requires careful consideration and studious investigation, was the personal manners of the people, and the influence they collectively exercised upon the dramatic literature of that epoch. This has been a vexed question, and has given rise to much interesting discussion by critics who have been both well and ill qualified to write upon the subject. The discussion has been, in great measure, occupied in balancing the effect produced by the immoral tendency of the stage as

it then existed. That the dramatic literature of the Restoration period was immoral, in the broadest sense of the word, is unquestionable; but that was only a reflection of the people of that time. The Puritanism of the Commonwealth had now found its reaction. People who, under Cromwell, walked about with hands clasped before them, who wore broad hats, long faces, and kept their eyes fixed upon the ground, who were heard to mutter fervent ejaculations and God-fearing expressions of piety and remorse for the crimes of their forefathers, now accompanied the king from Whitehall to the Haymarket, and laughed at Congreve's very questionable jokes and dialogues, and applauded the very improper impersonations of Wycherley's creation, till they could laugh and applaud no more. It was a reaction certainly, and one which must surely attend the enforcing of any dogmatic speculations upon a people. They knew that as long as they spoke through their noses, wore black clothes and unstarched linen, cultivated lank hair, showed the whites of their eyes, and, at all times and under all conditions, put in a word or two about seeking the Lord, they would be doing just what was wanted of them by those who had their prosperity at their disposal. But these symptoms have always been but a poor and hollow guarantee of real piety. Religion does not wear itself upon men's sleeves for daws to peck at, and, least of all, does it wear itself in peoples' looks, grimaces and gestures. And so it was with the people of this period. Most people are actors to some extent, and most people know how and when to pull long faces and turn their eyes to heaven when they know it will be

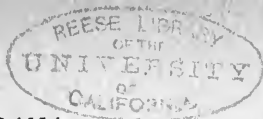
rewarded by pecuniary profit. But the time had arrived when acting was no longer necessary, when the people could appear as they really felt. And now the outburst commenced. Those feelings which had been so long restrained now received full vent in the fury which accompanied the reaction. As Macaulay very justly puts it: "A period of wild and desperate dissoluteness followed. Even in remote manor houses and hamlets the change was felt; but in London the outburst of debauchery was appalling, and in London the places most deeply infected were the palace, the quarters inhabited by the aristocracy, and the Inns of Court. It was on the support of these parts of the town that the playhouses depended. The character of the drama became conformed to the character of its patrons. The comic poet was the mouthpiece of the most deeply corrupted part of a corrupted society, and in the plays of this period we find, distilled and condensed, the essential spirit of the fashionable world during the anti-Puritan reaction."

The reaction which had so violently set in was rampant in the Court to such a degree that it was regarded as the most loose and licentious in Europe. There is a close analogy between the anti-Puritan reaction in England, the effects which followed, and the distinguishing characteristics which have marked the reign of Louis XIV. The conduct of the Regency was enacted on the public stage before audiences who crowded to see plays at which a few years before they would have shuddered. But the old Latin truism was never more applicable than then: *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*. The actor and the actress were

then fondled and caressed with an abnormal encouragement which has never been equalled, except, perhaps, in our own time; but even now it is only the fashion—then it was a natural craze. An actor who could make the theatre shake with laughter was thought more of than a Privy Councillor or a Prime Minister. The theatre was now occupied by men and women whose noses were once made crimson with weeping about the state of their souls, but which were now made purple with champagne and claret. An actor was thought a brave fellow if he made love on the stage in a fit of intoxication; and if the curtain had to be rung down on account of the inability of a star actress to appear owing to “indisposition,” it only caused a momentary flutter about the state of her health. As it was behind the footlights, so it was in front. A bandmaster who produced appalling sounds from the orchestra, and made hideous noises with an untuned fiddle, caused no other effect than a roar of laughter, followed by one of applause as the trombone fell off his seat in his attempt to reach the mouthpiece of his instrument. The times were, to say the least of them, lively, and the perusal of the dramatic and light literature of that time affords us the best means of appreciating the change which had taken place.

The author who was most conspicuously successful in his efforts at giving to the drama of the Restoration its complexion of grossness was, unquestionably, William Wycherley. Not only in immorality, however, is he the superior of his contemporaries, but he is also above them in the brilliancy and copiousness of his wit. His

dramatic works abound with smooth repartee, dash, and vigour; and he displays in his writings an agreeable vein of humour, which, if it were not for the prurient nature of his dialogue, would be interesting and welcome. As it is, however, his plays are so saturated with the prevailing tendency to gross indecency, that the mere mention of them is sufficient to cause a blush of deepest crimson. Wycherley was born in 1640—just two years before the Civil War broke out. His early years were spent sometimes in France and sometimes in England—at Queen's College, Oxford. Without taking a degree, he left his college with just sufficient knowledge of mathematics to understand the difference between mensuration and quadratic equations, and an acquaintance with the ancient classics which enabled him, ten years later, to quote Horace to the Duke of York, and a few lines of Ovid, when he had taken too much to drink. He began life as a barrister, as, indeed, many like him have done since; but, finding that he received more writs than briefs, he forsook the Inns of Court and the Petty Sessions for the more remunerative occupation of writing comedies, at which he completely succeeded. His mind appears to have been of the romantic type; and he early began to scribble verses, which are too bad for anybody but the bellman, and which no bellman with any sense of propriety would utter, much less place upon paper. But, as might easily have been expected, writing sonnets did not keep the duns from calling at his door, and enquiring eagerly after their money. Wycherley now perceived, like others less fortunate, that writing



indecent comedy would, at all events, procure him a competence. His education and his talents exactly equipped him for the task which he was about to undertake. Daily intercourse with the people about town had formed, not only his manners, but his mind to the groove which was essential to the playwright. A ready wit and an agreeable flow of light, garrulous conversation, coupled with sparkling wit and bright repartee, gave him at once a place beside the fashionables of the Court, who were not slow to recognise in him a pleasant man of the town, who was admirably qualified to make time hang lightly. He soon became an ornament in a select circle of the King's drawing-room; and his fascinating conversation and handsome presence soon made him a favourite with the ladies of Whitehall. He rose gradually to a position of friendship in the estimation of Charles, who recognised in the young author one who looked well beside himself whenever he walked out or held a levee in his palace. Wycherley possessed the invaluable trick of being able to put a smart thing into the mouth of another and replying to the equal advantage of both. In the tamest society he would have been an acquisition for killing time, and making ladies pleased with themselves because another had given them both the cause and the opportunity. It is hardly necessary to say that these successes, which Wycherley valued more than a baronetcy, at length turned his head. He became so utterly vain and self-conscious that even his reason was affected. He declared, in his old age, that he wrote *Love in a Wood* when he was only nineteen;

The Gentleman Dancing-Master at twenty-one; *The Plain Dealer* at twenty-five, and *The Country Wife* at two-and-thirty. Now, this boast has been proved, upon the most substantial grounds, to have been only another of those exaggerations of which everyone is more or less guilty, and which one does for the sake of momentary effect, but which most people heartily regret five minutes afterwards.

The fame of Wycherley exists wholly upon his comedies. As a writer of comedies he has been censured for the looseness of his narrative and the general bad tone of his morals. His writings certainly possess a charm, partly because of the excellence of the wit; but they are works which only boys read till they become men, when they are carefully selected from their libraries and judiciously committed to the flames.

The whole school of the Restoration dramatists gave itself up to the prevailing tendency of the age. Macaulay, in his essay on "The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration," writes excellently upon this subject, and shows, at the outset, why these dramas may be studied by all who are desirous of completing their literary education and studying the changes which take place and have taken place in the morals of society. His essay should, indeed, be studied by all who wish to become intimate with some of the early English dramatists and their respective styles of composition.

Comedy, to be appreciated, must be plain and straightforward. Abstract problems of humour should not be introduced on the stage if the author is desirous

of his play succeeding—financially. Life is too short to work out philosophical problems on the stage, and the authors will be wise to refrain from indulging in anything of this kind.

Humour should be made as spontaneous as possible. And with the word spontaneous may be included ready, sparkling, and effervescent. A capital illustration of this is found in Irish comedy, in which the characters are made to say the most witty things almost instantaneously and without apparent premeditation. The author who carefully studies the Hibernian element in his work will have laid a good foundation upon which to work.

By reading and studying the Irish drama, the author will, at least, appreciate the excellence of the wit, and the manner in which it is manipulated; and, although he may not utilise it in the same way as the original author, he will, nevertheless, understand its application. The plays of Dion Boucicault are models of Hibernian composition; so are the novels of Lever and Lover, and they are all worthy the perusal of a dramatic author.

The English people are very partial to the humour of the Irish, and the business of melodrama nearly always contains an Irish exponent. This distinctly proves that the Hibernian element is appreciated, and the young author, if he intends to devote his energy to melodrama, will do well to give the Irish authors a proportionate amount of his study.

The humour of the Society play, as it has been developed and refined by recent authors, seems to be founded upon the belief that the most accomplished wit

is that which partakes of the repartee kind. *The School for Scandal* is bubbling over with this particular class of humour, and dramatists have done well to renew it. There is always a refreshing sense of gentility and quick mental appreciation in this kind of wit, and as it is most frequently a play upon words, customs and manners, an author should endeavour, as much as possible, to be up to date and sparkling in his assimilation of phrase and his bandying of words.

Scotch wit is not so subtle as the Irish. It has not the same force or the same body. It lacks spontaneity. It is premeditated, and this is never so effective as when it is instantaneous. The wit of the Highlander consists "not in what he says, but in the way he says it." The drollery of a situation may be enhanced and developed by the particular emphasis upon a certain syllable, or it may be rendered most effective by a peculiar inflection. This, the author who proposes to write comedy should be able to understand and appreciate. A word or syllable introduced in a certain place may cause a general round of laughter and make a whole scene, and a few such touches may be the making of an entire comedy.

✓ The author of comedy should have, above all things, a clear and precise method of working out his scenes. Many excellent plays, we are told, have been written by men who had not any previous knowledge of what they were about to write till they actually came to the scenes which ultimately proved the best in the play. This is either pure chance or genius of the first order. Sometimes a writer may choose a title for a play, and write

away from that title, having to choose another with no relation whatever to the one he had before fixed on. This we can quite believe, but the practice is not a good one for a beginner to adopt. He may spend months in writing and staining paper, and then arrive at nothing in the end.

If a happy thought should strike him he should jot it down at once, and endeavour to weave a plot of some kind around it. This he can easily manipulate, but he will experience greater difficulty in condensing several hundred pages of manuscript, which will, in all probability, lead to nothing but the waste-paper basket.

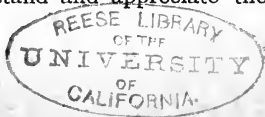
In playwriting, a great deal necessarily depends upon the author's own individuality and means of resource. Some authors, at a comparatively early stage in their profession, have given examples of their genius in a remarkable manner. Mr. Pinero produced some of his best work when he was still a young man, and Mr. Haddon Chambers is another instance. It is a mistake to suppose that the older a dramatist, or any other literary character, becomes, the better, therefore, will be his literary achievements. The work of young men is not infrequently their best performances, and journalists have often observed that their best writings were done while they were still in their novitiate. The art of writing in any department, we are convinced, soon becomes a mere mechanical process, and those who have had any experience in writing, whether it be as critics, as descriptive writers, or as novelists, will readily admit that, as they become practised and experienced in their craft, the novelty of

what is generally talked of as inspiration, &c., soon wears off. An experienced writer develops a particular style of diction and composition, and he adheres to it almost as a personal characteristic. We remember being present at a dinner at which were assembled some of the leading writers and critics of London journalism. As soon as the cloth had been removed, somebody, in the course of the conversation, declared that every writer of experience had a peculiar style inseparably associated with himself. This was both questioned and agreed to ; some were of his opinion, and others challenged it. The matter was finally put to a practical test by the originator of the discussion. All those present, it must be understood, were men of considerable literary reputation, and their individual style of composition was mutually understood. They had all repeatedly read each other's articles and critiques, and it was decided that each should write about a dozen lines on a piece of paper upon any topic he chose, and then place it in a small basket in the centre of the table. The idea was eagerly adopted, and after all had agreed to write in their accustomed and usual style, they set to work. The basket was handed round, and when the manuscripts were shuffled, our host (who is to-day a leader-writer of distinction) took from among the rest the first scrap of paper. The handwriting was disguised as much as possible, but the handwriting was not a clue to the host. We each placed upon a separate piece of paper the name of the person who was supposed to be the writer of the composition as it was read out. After

each had been read we read out our names. The result was a complete demonstration of the fact that all those literary gentlemen had an individual and particular style of composition, which was easily perceptible in a dozen lines. This led to a further inquiry, and it was discovered *why* the resemblance existed. One journalist, in particular, had a trick of concluding a sentence nearly always with a word of three syllables. Another was extremely fond of using parenthetical clauses, although he himself never before noticed the partiality. Another, again, was inclined to use a syllogism in the announcement of his facts, and would hardly ever open up a statement without first of all coming to his facts by a logical sequence of argumentation. And so on. They all, with few exceptions, gave their consent to the theory which had started the discussion, and were finally persuaded of its soundness.

As it is in ordinary writing, so it is in dramatic authorship. An author, as he becomes acquainted with his subject, will gradually cultivate a distinct manner or style of writing, and he should endeavour, when once he has acquired a particular and definite style, to adhere to it and to develop it.

The author who would aim at staking his reputation upon the writing of comedy, should first of all satisfy himself that he is fitted for such composition. As far as our own observations are concerned, the writing of good genuine comedy is by far the most difficult school of dramatic authorship. The author, to succeed in this department, must understand and appreciate the likes



and dislikes of the public taste. His mind should become saturated with the predominating characteristics of the society for which he intends to cater. His comedy should be as instantaneous as possible, and it should be timely, that is to say, he should study the prevailing tendency of the times in which he lives, and in which he writes. Comedy and tragedy do not go hand in hand, and the writer who wishes to succeed at the one would do well not to meddle or dabble in the other. I do not mean it to be inferred that, because comedy and tragedy do not go together, therefore, all seriousness is to be eschewed. Dramatic writing under this condition would simply be reduced to mere farce.

Comedy does not simply mean laughter. It may often mean tears, and genuine salt tears, too—tears of sorrow and tears of joy. Mere comedy and nothing else is very little distinguishable from mere farce. Scenes should be properly balanced; that is to say, due regard must be had for the relative weight of characterisation and the proportionate value of dramatic personages. The distribution of characteristic effects has great influence in the making and the marring of a piece. The author who, above all others, succeeded to the greatest extent in this respect was, unquestionably, Shakespeare. He appears to have understood in a remarkable manner the most useful means of placing a personage upon the stage. From the time a character is on the stage before the public he should be occupying the attention of that public. A character should not be introduced for no perceptible purpose. Time is wasted and the action hampered by

the presence of a character who does nothing for the progress of the piece. The uninterrupted progress of the play is the first consideration; and, unless it be arranged that the characters appear and do something for the furtherance of the plot and general scheme of the play, one of the greatest faults in dramatic composition is committed.

The author who is, to-day, singularly fortunate in this very essential particular is Mr. A. W. Pinero. We know of no play of his where he introduces any character that does not render good service to the purport of the play. A capital instance of this is found in the development of the plot in *The Profligate*. The scene in which the wife of the profligate and his victim overhear the conversation between the two men as they pass across the stage is quite natural and dramatic; and it is scenes of this kind especially which distinguish the experienced dramatic writer. We are as sure that this scene, and scenes like it, were mentally worked out by Mr. Pinero, and not the result of any kind of inspiration, as we are that it is this particular kind of workmanship which has placed him in that position of eminence which he now occupies.

The student of dramatic history who has any intention of devoting himself to the perusal of the drama, with the ultimate object of writing plays, should cultivate a taste for the discovery and appreciation of such scenes as these. They are models upon which the young dramatist may work and, if possible, develop. The manner of writing plays has always differed, and will continue to differ. Hence there can be no rules

laid down by which an author, or would-be author, may succeed in writing plays. Nevertheless, there are plenty of hints which may be given to the author concerning, not so much what he ought to do as, rather, what he should *avoid* doing; and it will not, therefore, be improper if we give, in a necessarily brief manner, what are usually regarded as imperfections or, at all events, blemishes in dramatic writing.

III.—THE GRAMMAR OF PLAYWRITING

A playwright should understand something of the technique of his art, and should know the principal rudiments of his business. The following random remarks may serve to give him an inclination to acquire more. It is considered injudicious to "discover" your characters on the stage, that is to say, characters who are found upon the stage when the curtain ascends. This fault is rendered more conspicuous if the character is an important one. Many actors decline to be "discovered," especially if they are creating the part in which they are to appear. There are occasions, of course, where it would be almost impossible to avoid discovering a character; but, if such is the case, the author should thoroughly understand the reason why he places his character there, and that reason should be a good one. Actors like their entrances "led up to" by previous mention of their names by the other people of the cast, in order that the audience may expect them when they appear. Mr. Sidney Grundy is frequently very happy in this respect, and he seems to have spared no pains in the working out of his exits and entrances.

As it is important that the entrance be properly regulated, so also is it essential that the exit is equally well arranged. A character should not be upon the stage unless he or she is doing or saying something for the furtherance and action of the play. Unless the character is thus advantageously occupied, his or her presence is detrimental to the other characters upon the stage. The attention of the audience should be directed immediately to the chief personages engaged in the action of the play, and the fewer the characters the more intense will be the interest. When the attention of an audience is distributed it becomes lost and often exhausted. The aim and purpose of the author should be to concentrate the attention of the spectators in the most intense manner possible, and the success of the piece will greatly depend upon the structure of the play in respect to this detail.

An author often experiences a difficulty, not only in knowing when and where to introduce a character, but also when and where to dispense with his or her services. No rule or example can be laid down for this. The author has here to learn a most important lesson, which can only be fully understood by his frequenting the theatre and following the numerous plays which are annually produced, and noticing how the author has arranged his situations. The author must endeavour to analyse the plays he sees, and follow the course of their success or failure, and then reason out with himself why they were successes or failures. He should take the play scene by scene and act by act, and dissect the parts which constitute the whole, and examine in every detail

why the play pleased or displeased. He will do well to read carefully the critiques of the best writers, and note where and how they agree and differ. His own judgment must then decide which of the many are near the best analysis. He should now form a synthesis of the analysis, and cast up the chief points in the arguments of the critics till he is satisfied in his own mind of the correctness of their opinions. There may have been certain scenes and certain acts which received special mention for their skilfulness and excellence. These portions of the play deserve to be repeatedly considered and studied, and in such a way that the author will benefit by their perusal. By attending the rehearsals of new plays by authors of distinction the novice will be able to acquire information which will be invaluable to him. The stage manager, especially if he is one of experience, will be brimming over with suggestions of distinct value and importance. An author, too, will have plenty to say and do, and sometimes even undo, because what may have read well may not play effectively, and this portion of the play will be, in many cases, considered a subject for alteration and improvement.

The phrasing of a play, especially if it be a comedy, should be as rapid and as consecutive as possible. The quantity of dialogue introduced and allotted to each character is a matter of opinion, and, consequently, no hard and fast rule, or even suggestion, is to be followed. It may be said, however, that too much should not be given to any one speaker, whether for the principal or minor characters. Authors who are also actors generally give themselves too much to say, and this was especially

the case with Boucicault in *The Life of an Actress*, a play which reads remarkably well and plays remarkably badly. Actors, of course, like plenty to say, and they are extremely partial to the speech, especially if it be an entreaty to the heroine or a denunciation of the villain. The latest school of dramatic authors are fortunately predisposed against the speech; but a star actor, more especially if he be at all concerned in the writing of the play, will be a dramatic curio if he has not a speech for himself at the end of which he expects thunders of applause and several calls before the curtain.

The interruptions and interpolations of the characters should always be happy and pointed, and bear directly upon the subject at issue. Otherwise the interruption or question, whatever else the matter may be, will add nothing to, but rather detract from the quality of the dialogue. The principal character in the piece or scene, or he whose services are most particularly in request at the time, should, undoubtedly, have the greater part of the dialogue, not because he is the principal, but because it is supposed the principal is actively engaged in the furtherance of the play.

An actor does not, again, like to be *talked at* by another, and, therefore, none of the characters should be made to talk at the others; they should rather be made to *talk to* each other. It is, we think, bad policy to leave an actor alone upon the stage, unless there be a good and sufficient reason, because they then have to indulge generally in soliloquisms, which are to be avoided. Shakespeare's genius has been repeatedly manifested in his soliloquies, but then the novice must not begin

by considering himself a Shakespeare. What suited the age for which Shakespeare wrote will not suit this age, unless it be Shakespeare. He wrote, not for one age, but for every age; but then he was Shakespeare. A novice should avoid the tendency to do something just because So-and-So has done it. The author must use his own individuality, and not borrow that of another author. An idea borrowed from another is generally marred in the borrowing, and, to use a hackneyed but pithy expression, "the game isn't worth the candle." Before all things, be original; an author can never hope to make a reputation if he lives and writes by re-writing what others have written. It is one thing to use the works of others as models, it is quite another thing to crib from them. This is too frequently the case, even with dramatists of reputation and distinction, and the practice is to be condemned as dishonourable and dishonest. The legal bearing upon plays is extremely equivocal and misleading, and there are loopholes through which a dishonest dramatist may readily escape. The action of a play should not be interrupted by the introduction of topics which have little or nothing to do with the main purport of the piece. Frequently whole scenes are devoted to the discussion of sundry matters which have not the most indirect bearing on the ultimate climax. Many authors have certainly been singularly successful in the manner in which they weave into their dialogue references to topical events, but the practice does not admit of much development, and cannot conscientiously be recommended to the beginner.

It is commonly admitted, among even the most experienced dramatists, that they frequently find a difficulty in beginning a play. The opening scene appears to give cause for the chief anxiety. And, indeed, a good opening to a play is half the battle. First impressions are generally valued, especially with the majority of people. Make a good first act. But even a good first act does not compensate for the remainder of the work being badly finished. We had an example in Mr. James's play, *Guy Domville*, at the St. James's Theatre, which possessed the unquestionable advantage of a thoroughly good first act, but, the remainder of the play being weak, the whole performance was condemned by almost all the critics.

If any portion of the play is to suffer, it should be the middle portion. The commencement and the end of the play should stand out in bold relief. An audience likes to leave the theatre with good impressions, and not disappointed. It may forget the inferiority of the second act, but it cannot be recompensed if the third or last acts be bad. The author, then, should strive to place his workmanship into those parts of his work which will be most easily remembered, and which the audience are less likely to forget.

The young dramatic author should avoid the dangerous experiment of employing too many characters in the telling of his story. It would be nonsensical to attempt to give any code by which a writer may choose his characters, or the number of them. The working of the play, and the manner in which the plot is developed, must, in a great measure, guide the writer. He will, however, soon learn, by experience, that four characters

are less difficult to manipulate than eight, and that the greater the number of people on the stage the greater also will be the difficulty in grouping them.

Characters upon the stage should be as dissimilar as possible, both in their individuality and make-up. Audiences do not like the same dish placed before them again and again during the piece. They do not mind one character, but they will not tolerate many or more of the same kind. Two colonels or two doctors are nearly always wearisome unless there is judicious use made of them. Two barristers may be discovered working in their chambers, or two doctors may be seen in consultation; but unless there is a direct and definite purpose for their presence, it is not considered good workmanship to introduce them. Then, again, the individuality of the characters should be altogether different. This is a matter which needs no demonstration. We will presume that the playwright who understands his business also understands Shakespeare, the greatest model in the subtlety of his individualisation. The dramatist will perceive how in Shakespeare is the individuality of his characters kept pre-eminently apart the one from the other. A man is never created by him to speak, act, or think like a woman. A child is the child absolute, and not only a child absolute, but a real living and existing creation. The character of Arthur in *King Arthur* is an illustration which instinctively presents itself. Ophelia and Desdemona are as different the one from the other as are *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and yet they are men and women in every line they utter. The situations in which they are

placed are those which any woman might occupy, and which, doubtless, thousands have occupied. The genius of Shakespeare was here signally displayed in a most conspicuous manner, and the student of the drama who wishes to understand the secret springs of passion and emotion, would do well to study the bard in this one particular element of his workmanship. The student should brood over his plays, and become saturated with their construction and the manner of their composition. Let him dissect one character from the other, and analyse the two; compare them together, and note the distinction between the two; go closely into details, and separate the principles of one act from those of another. Go deeper still, and ask yourself the reason *why* the author does such and such a thing; seek for the reason till you have found it. Understand to the fullest extent why he introduces characters at certain stages, and why they exit at certain stages. Imagine the character on the stage acting and speaking, and imagine that you are the audience, and note the impression each character makes upon you as it enters and leaves the stage of your imagination. Think out whether or not it would be more advantageous or useful to introduce a character at a certain point in the narrative. All this, and a great deal more, requires study and application, and study of a very severe kind. And the would-be dramatic author must be prepared to study and to think, and to *learn* to think, if he has not already done so.

It is a matter of considerable importance to know whether it will be best to keep the sequence of the plot

unknown to the audience. Sometimes it is better to take them into your confidence, and sometimes it is better to take them by surprise. This point should be thoroughly considered by the author before he commits himself either way, and he should fully understand the reason why he chooses either method of working out his play. The majority of dramatic works are in favour of taking the audience into the confidence of the author and allowing them to watch the working out of the scheme. I think this is by far the better method. It is more natural, and the attention of an audience will be more engrossed by it. The other plan is certainly more exciting, but it is more risky, and an audience may be disappointed with the result.

An audience does not like being disappointed in the unravelling of the story. It prefers to find its own anticipations realised. It may, however, be judicious to suspend the consecutive working out of the story by the introduction of some means which will heighten the interest of an audience; but this should not be done at the expense of the main points of the narrative. The narrative, generally speaking, should be interrupted as seldom as possible; but, when a change of any kind does take place, it should be, if anything, a relief to the audience. In big melodramas which require extensive staging it has often been found useful to introduce a character or two to entertain the house while a scene is being arranged at the back of the curtain. If these characters and their business are introduced, it must be done circumspectly; otherwise the audience will see through the device and lose their confidence in the

play. All this amounts to saying briefly that the workmanship of the play should be kept in the background; the audience should not know how the scenes are arranged or why they are arranged. It should be enough for them that they are so arranged, and if "the tricks of the trade" are hidden from them they will be all the more satisfied.

To completely appreciate the skill and technical knowledge required in play-writing it would be necessary for us to go fully into the details of stage-craft, and lay bare all the various means adopted in stage carpentry. This would be a ridiculous attempt at giving the novice the clue to write plays, and it would, moreover, be quite impracticable. The best thing the young author could do is *to go on the stage* and see for himself how things are done. Practical knowledge is always preferable to theoretical smattering, and the young dramatic scribe will find ample opportunity (if he keeps his eyes and ears open) to cultivate an acquaintance with the mysteries of stage-craft.

There are very few cases where authors have produced good plays without having first of all studied the resources of the stage. Mr. A. W. Pinero was a student of elocution. He then learnt to know the value and importance of words and sentences. He grasped the force and the meaning of the text in the plays, which he studied while yet in his novitiate. He then went on the stage, and mixed with actors and stage managers, stage carpenters and all who were competent to give advice upon stage manœuvres. Consequently, he gained both practical and theoretical experience, and, of course,

afterwards profited by it. H. J. Byron was an actor; otherwise we doubt if he would ever have written *Our Boys*. T. W. Robertson strutted on the boards, else he might never have written *Caste*; and many other actor-dramatists could be mentioned who owe a considerable portion of their success to their theatrical apprenticeship. There are, however, hundreds, perhaps thousands, who have been actively engaged on the stage, possessing every opportunity for cultivating and acquiring a knowledge of stage-craft, and yet who could never write a scene to save their lives. This goes to prove that a dramatist cannot be taught how to write a play, and all the teaching in the world would not avail him. But a young author who has any talent can cultivate that talent which, without cultivation, would probably be useless. If the would-be dramatist has any ability, let him cultivate it by all means and develop his dramatic instincts and acquirements; but at the same time let this be done in the most direct way. Let him set to work with a will and acquire gradually and thoroughly the principles which constitute the grammar of his craft. He should move in dramatic circles and gain every possible item of information from the conversation of old and experienced authors, actors and stage managers. If the young author has any natural gifts and possesses confidence, prudence and common-sense, we cannot conceive any reason why he should not succeed in writing a successful play.

Besides all this, the dramatic author should be conversant with all the standard works upon the drama. The essays of Hazlitt upon Shakespeare and the early

English authors should be read, and as a more advanced work dealing with the drama the writings of Dr. Hermann Ulrici should be perused. All kinds of dramatic history and biography may be read with advantage, for, although they will not teach the dramatist to write plays any more than reading novels will enable a person to write fiction, they are, nevertheless, a means by which the mind may be enriched with dramatic topics.

[Above all, the dramatist should be a student of the times in which he lives. He should be in touch with all social and political movements. Many blunders are made by dramatists who do not know how people move in fashionable society, and when they write dialogue supposed to be characteristic of "the upper ten," it is not only uncharacteristic, but often absurd. Frequently, mistakes occur by making references which are incorrect, and which show at once that the author did not write from actual experience of things mentioned. Many mistakes of this kind are discovered at rehearsal; but often they escape, and are left for the critics to giggle over on "the first night."]

IV.—NOVELIST AND DRAMATIST

[Whether a good novelist can make a good dramatist is a question about which there can be very little discussion. The two spheres of literary art are altogether dissimilar, and require dissimilar qualifications.] We can recall very few names which have been associated with authors who have been successful both as novelists and as dramatists. The reason is not difficult to find.

Sir Walter Scott, in his essay on the life of Henry Fielding, makes the following excellent observations :

“It is the object of the novel writer to place before the reader as full and accurate a representation of the events which he relates as can be done by the mere force of an excited imagination without the assistance of material objects. His sole appeal is made to the world of fancy and of ideas, and in this consists his strength and his weakness, his poverty and his wealth. He cannot, like the painter, present a visible and tangible representation of his towns and his woods, his palaces and his castles ; but awakening the imagination of a congenial reader, he places before his mind’s eye landscapes fairer than those of Claude and wilder than those of Salvator.”

But here the novelist stops. In balancing a dialogue and giving points to a description he does all that it is possible for him to do, be he a Dickens, a Thackeray, a George Eliot or a Ouida. The novelist has plainly many advantages over the dramatist, because he can indulge in extensive parades of dialogue and description, where a dramatist would be limited in the one and completely debarred from the other. A novelist has not to consider almost to a nicety the extent to which he may go in the length of his chapters. A dramatist who does not attend scrupulously to this element in his art commits an egregious error at the outset. The length of the scenes of a play is, and always was, a matter of the gravest anxiety to the dramatic author. The distribution of the dialogue in the several scenes is always attended with considerable care and circumspection. Whether

the direct basis of the plot will be commenced in the first part of the first scene or the last part of the second scene; whether the heroine shall become engaged to the hero in the first or the second act; whether the hero shall be cut off with a shilling in the commencement of the play or during its progress—all this is matter for study by the author. In novel writing, although there is a measure of the same responsibility, the author has not so many various circumstances to consider. That his book will consist of three hundred pages or six hundred pages depends partly upon the writer's pocket, partly upon his reputation as an author of entertaining fiction, and partly upon his genius to develop the interest of his novel to the end.

The dramatist is differently circumstanced. He must confine his play within the limits of three, four or five acts, according to the nature of the piece and according to the caprice of the public taste. It may be found to be judicious to write a Society play in four acts, as it has been found advantageous to write a farcical comedy in three acts. Melodrama is usually developed in five acts, with intermittent scenes. In all this the author who aspires to dramatic authorship will be puzzled what line to adopt. He may conclude that his play will be best confined to four acts. He may then be told that there is not sufficient interest in his performance to warrant it being presented in four, and that it should be cut down to three. The author will, under these and similar circumstances, have to depend largely upon his own judgment and discretion, and run the chance of his work either falling or standing upon its own merits.

The province of the novelist is that he depends largely upon description for his effects, and the nature of the dramatist is that he depends wholly upon dialogue. The novelist has certainly the double advantage of being able to enforce his dialogue by the aid of his description. The description used by the novelist must be rendered by the business of the actors and the theatrical accessories upon the stage. That which the novelist takes such pains to describe, is already present upon the stage. Any further description would be unnecessary, nay, fatal to the success of the piece. The scenic artist and stage-carpenter have done the work which the author of the novel laboured so assiduously to depict realistically, and render complete by the aid and instrumentality of his powers of graphic description. The lake, the forest, the ruined castle, instead of being placed before our imagination in three octavo pages, are there upon the stage represented in almost natural distinctness and vivid reality.

Again, the novelist has full power to mix his dialogue with the description, and hence the narrative often becomes a highly interesting descriptive dialogue, heightened by the sparkling wit of the characters and the mutual interchange of their ideas. The dulness of lengthy description is relieved by the timely appearance of the hostess, the guests in the coach. The reader is kept in a constant fever of excitement as to the final catastrophe, which in a play is generally seen before the curtain falls upon the first act. The reader of a novel may wade through thirty chapters and be surprised at the climax at the end. A breathless interest

may be sustained, the reader enchanted, carried away by the onward current of the author's thoughts, as irresistibly interested as by the transitions of an exciting panorama.

The exquisite word-painting of Bulwer Lytton is an instance which may be cited. Who has ever read his works without experiencing the sensation known among penny-a-liners as "breathless excitement"? Dickens was a master, in one sense the most accomplished master, of that peculiar kind of loose description which at once captivates and enriches the reader's imagination with the multiplicity of its objects and the faithfulness of the likeness. This valuable power he well understood and utilised with distinguished advantage. Not alone did he introduce it into the purely descriptive portions of his works, he made eminent use of it in the characterisation of his individuals and creations. The descriptions which are placed in inverted commas and put in the mouths of his characters glow with animation. It is undoubtedly this element in his works which has tended so much to constitute Dickens one of the foremost masters of literary portraiture, and it is at the same time this qualification which has been the means of rendering his works unfit as plays and stage representations. For the more the descriptive element enters into a work of imagination, the more that work will be unfitted for stage representation. It is a fact as strikingly true as the conclusion of a valid syllogism, that a great novelist cannot be a great, or even good, dramatist. If we reason out this assertion purely by analogy, we will find it correct. Henry Fielding wrote comedies in his early life; when he was matured both

in judgment and years, he wrote a novel. He wrote plays to earn a subsistence, like most of his contemporaries, and it was not till he had been raised to the dignity of a Justice of the Peace that he thought of writing his best performance. It was not till he had passed through all those vicissitudes of fortune, which in Johnson produced his *Trip to the Hebrides*, and in Goldsmith produced "*The Deserted Village*" and "*The Citizen of the World*," that in Fielding produced "*Tom Jones*," the work which has immortalised him. It might have been supposed that, when the angry and impatient creditors were kicking out the panels of his doors in the Temple, he would have been impelled to exert the best part of his genius to pay them off. It might have been supposed that Johnson, while he was going about like a half-famished wolf, dropping with hunger, in Fleet Street, would have exerted himself to write the works by which posterity will best remember him. Yet it was not till Johnson was in comparatively easy circumstances that he wrote his account of the Hebrides and his "*Lives of the Poets*." This class of men have been generally found in good circumstances before they give the best products of their minds to the world.

We shall pursue the analogy no further, but content ourselves with one case, which, we think, will be sufficiently conclusive. The comedies of Fielding are good of their kind, but they sink into insignificance when compared with the author's genius as exemplified in "*Tom Jones*." And the reason appears to be because what is really worthy of the author of the "*Foundling*" is in his dramatic pieces distinctly out of place. On

the other hand, however, the perusal of his great work shows us how this is. The author who aimed at writing plays was essentially a descriptive writer, and not a writer of dialogue. But his dialogue was sufficiently elegant and polished to be associated with his description. His description was, however, so far above his dialogue, that the wonder is he ever thought of writing plays at all. The only reason which suggests itself is that play-writing was then the fashion, the craze, and he who wished to gain public notoriety and distinction could do nothing better to attain the object of his ambition than by writing plays. Whether they were good or bad was a matter concerning which the author does not appear to have given much attention. They were plays, and that was enough. They were all dialogue, broken up into scenes and acts; their characters came under the title of *dramatis personæ*, and that was apparently all that was wanted.

It would have been needless, if not idle, to prolong the discussion of this point further, were it not for the fact that a similar school of playwrights is again springing up. Why an author who has been a success at novel writing should become weary of that occupation where he has earned reputation and profit, and waste precious time upon the thankless and expensive luxury of scribbling badly constructed plays, it is difficult to understand. It does not appear to be natural or consistent that an imaginative writer should be endowed with a sufficiency of Nature's gifts to enable him to be acceptable in both spheres of literature. In fact, the consequence of his being good in one department would

seem to imperil, if not altogether to nullify, his ability in the other. A clever novelist is continually introducing into his plays narrative description which is fatal to the interest of the piece. A novelist may not understand why his description, which is so valuable elsewhere, should be of little use in a play. Were a novelist to depend wholly upon his dialogue for all his effect, it seems certain that his work would be of little use. Were it simply description in a series of descriptive essays dished up under appropriate headings, his work would also be of little use. It is the amalgamation and intermixture of the two elements which, when they are judiciously interwoven, make a good work of fiction. The novelist who has most successfully distinguished herself in this respect is, we think, Ouida. Her imaginative works are clearly a proof that narrative, to be interesting, must be interwoven with dialogue. But she possesses the power of engrafting the two elements in a higher degree of perfection than any novelist with whom we are acquainted. The boldness with which she draws all her strokes of characterisation is discernible in all her writings, but in none more especially than in "Moths." The principal characters of this novel and the surroundings are so artistically moulded and adapted to the sequence of the plot and the general purport of the story, that they might have been the outcome of a laborious process of characterisation and study. Yet there seems to be such spontaneity and reality among them all, that the creative faculty of the author must have conceived them, not in the making, rude, unfinished, and angular, but in all the glow and freshness of animal life.

It is certainly this feature more than any other which has been the means of the success of "Moths" as a stage performance. The whole story is dramatic, and the interest is kept so vividly alive throughout the piece, that the dramatic instinct must be regarded as one of its chief attributes.

We cannot say that we have observed the same degree or kind of workmanship in any of our other novelists. The works of Miss Braddon on the whole, if they lack anything, lack dramatic interest and intense reality. In a prolific writer such as she undoubtedly is, one might have looked for and expected to find numerous specimens of the novelist's character, deeply studied and artistically represented. Yet we cannot recall one of her many works in which this characteristic is eminently portrayed or represented. In "Lady Audley's Secret," which is perhaps one of her most dramatic works, there is no indication that the authoress, although she was acquainted with the stage, rightly understood the meaning and application of dramatic perspective. Unquestionably she wrote not for the stage, but for the fireside; nevertheless, one might have expected to find developed in the initial effort of a writer of such prolific resources the chief and primary element which constitutes the excellence of fiction. The quality in this author which has nearly always best atoned for this want of literary perfection, is the grasp she has always held over a situation. But this in itself does not make amends for the absence of dramatic perspective. The means by which a situation may be rendered highly dramatic does not necessarily

make the characters and the action of the piece dramatic. There is in Miss Braddon's works the absence of force and dramatic passion which are to be found in all Ouida's books. The prevailing tendency, which has become the fashion, to dwell too much upon the details of descriptive and epigram, to the deterioration of the force of the story, must be signally detrimental to any piece of fiction. Mr. Rider Haggard, in "Dawn" and "The Witches' Head," has closely followed the plan, which has really become a principle, that there can be no interest where there is no force. The absolute basis upon which the drama in its perfect aspect rests, is upon the principle that passion and force are the regulators of the action of the story. Feebleness can be tolerated nowhere in fiction, where character and situation are the two chief ingredients which guide the reader's imagination, and give colour and life to the author's diction.

"Dawn" has an excellent subject for its treatment, and one that can never be too fully understood and scientifically discussed—the passion of the human heart. The subject never becomes weary where men and women exist, and where there is human emotion and human sympathy. And the author of "Dawn" has shown, in his treatment of this all-absorbing passion, that he has pried into the depths of man's and woman's heart, and analysed the feelings and the desires of Nature. This he has unfolded with palpable skill and power, giving expression, as he proceeds, to the fundamental principle which governs good fiction. And as Mr. Haggard has this gift in many respects superior to any one of his

contemporaries, he has a fault which almost counter-balances his other distinguishing characteristics—he has yet to learn the value of a judicious application of what is known in authorship as “contributing circumstances.” His conclusions, too, are not so good as his commencements. His contributing circumstances become prolonged toward the end, and we have the initial development of a new story. The welding together of trivial circumstances should be made to harmonise with the general tenor of the plot. Yet Mr. Haggard places too much confidence in his power of creating new interest before he has utilised the old. His pictures and his action towards the end of his narratives are too rapidly changed, and in such a way as to transfer the characters from one situation to another without a sufficient reason. The result is that the several parts of the story are ill-balanced, and the interest, which should have been continuous and consecutive, is interrupted by some new circumstance which has no real object with the ultimate catastrophe and consequence. These qualities are what we have had the assumption to regard as faults in Mr. Haggard’s writing, but they are relieved by many excellencies, which have repeatedly been enumerated in connection with his fascinating stories.

These blemishes in the style of the author of “King Solomon’s Mines” are not those which are found conspicuously absent in other authors, but which are rather too plentifully profuse. But they are those which require the presence of singularly good attributes to render tolerable. We are often ready to forget a fault if there are many beauties to relieve it, and these are certainly present

in this author's composition. What we cannot pardon, and what we never try to excuse, is the presence of intolerable errors which any intelligence must necessarily deem inconsistent with good fiction. And the preponderance of errors and exaggeration we find plentifully distributed in the works of nearly every novelist who depends wholly on what is technically termed "inspiration." An author who simply writes down what comes into his head and continues to add to it by a continuance of inspired description or dialogue, will surely fall into this error as unmistakably as an undisciplined child will prefer doing wrong. And this seems to have been the *modus operandi* adopted by the generality of novelists and dramatists who periodically appear upon the literary horizon. That they do revise and amend their work goes without saying, but if we were to take up some works of fiction which issue from the press, they would give us the impression of being done so hastily and so spasmodically that we must perforce conclude their authors acted on the principle of adopting what first presented itself to their imagination.

As this refers to novels, so it does to dramatic writing. The young author who has had little or no experience in dramatic writing, usually takes the advice contained in the articles of the critics. This is of necessity fragmentary and loose, and, to say the least of it, frequently vague and amateurish. What the majority of the newspaper critics know about the structure of a play we could never ascertain. And yet they are heard to dilate upon the most abstruse problems of stage-craft and effect, as if they were

minutely acquainted with the whole process of stage management. Nevertheless, they do occasionally give some good advice to the young author after they have almost annihilated him with their sarcasms. The young dramatic author has much to learn, and yet he has almost insuperable difficulties placed in his path when he begins his novitiate. There is something peculiarly aggravating in an author being told off-hand that his play failed because he did not fulfil the laws of the drama. The frantic author may well enquire what the laws of the drama really are, and the critics would be clever fellows if they could inform him. The fact is, there is nothing which could go by the name *law* in connection with the drama. It is a convenient way of appearing as if the critics knew a great deal more about playwriting than the author himself, when in reality they generally know nothing. We never have read a criticism upon a play which the critic regarded as a failure, which gave us the impression that the critic could have done better, or, indeed, done as well. And yet they speak from a pedestal of judgment, as though they were a quorum of judges settling a simple point of law, or an assembly of surgeons examining a medical student. No doubt, these worthy Pressmen are well-intentioned, and have very high notions of the art of which they are champions; but, until they become more explicit upon technical points of the dramatist's art, it must be concluded they know little about the science of dramatic criticism.

The dramatic critic should give the author all the assistance in his power, and he should place before

him a systematic enunciation of the faults he may have committed, and he should explain himself simply and intelligibly. Why is it that critics do not do this? The answer suggests itself—they have not the technical knowledge, the scientific acquaintance with the literature of the drama and the theatre which they should possess, the absence of which they seek to conceal by a literary excrescence euphemistically dubbed “dramatic criticism.”

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAMA: ITS INFLUENCE. DOES IT EDUCATE?

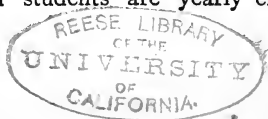
THERE are few more debatable questions than that which is constantly enquiring whether or not the drama acts as a factor of influence, and whether that influence is a good one. Has the drama in its legitimate bearing any educational influence, and how does that influence operate? Those who are fit to reason upon this point are only those who have any connection with the drama either as playgoers, dramatists, or actors. Those who remain at home and shudder at the very thought of witnessing a play are certainly those whose opinion cannot be of any great value. Grave charges have been, and we suppose will continue to be, made against the theatres, because many people see, or say they see, in them a direct means of going astray. They sum up the entire situation by saying that the influence of plays is bad, intolerable, and hence young people, and even grown people, should not go to the theatre. Many excellent clergymen have repeatedly put their veto upon the question by denouncing the theatre as a place of amusement, and regard it as one of those evils with which society is pestered. It is simply another case where one story is good till another is told. The examination of the pros and cons of the question cannot fail to be highly interesting.

There is, and necessarily must be, a close relationship between the drama of an age and the literature of that age. Now, unquestionably, literature has an influence, and a powerful influence, upon the reading public; and as the drama and literature are closely allied, one being simply an exponent of the other, the drama and the theatre must have a proportional influence upon the educated community. That an age and a society have been and are the means of creating a literary epoch, and that the nature of that literature is affected by the age (and not *vice versa*), it will be readily admitted at the outset that the people are not reflected by the drama, but the drama by the people. It is not the drama which creates the people, but the people who create the drama. There never was a clearer case of this than during the Restoration period when Farquhar and Wycherley wrote. The dramatic works of that period were affected by the predominating tastes of the Court and the populace. The age previous to the Restoration is another proof. The Puritans regarded the theatre and the drama with befitting horror and detestation. These are examples, then, of the influence of society upon the drama, and they might be enlarged by others taken from the Continental schools of drama, which, like ours, have from time to time received periodical and spasmodic changes and fluctuations.

The fact, therefore, that the drama is influenced by the people is not plainer than that the people are influenced by the drama. That they are influenced is one matter, *how* they are influenced is quite another. All sensible people, we are sure, will readily admit that

persons who would have been virtuous and respectable citizens before they saw a play of questionable morality would continue to be virtuous after they had seen it—that is, if they were destined to be virtuous at all. It is almost impossible to believe that a young lady who had been brought up in an atmosphere of morality would suddenly become immoral because she saw what has been termed an immoral play. It seems more difficult still to understand why clergymen who preach against the drama, allow young women of tender and impressionable years to read and study the Bible, when there are expressed in the Scriptures references unfit for any delicately constituted mind. There certainly never was introduced into a play of any kind such expressions as are to be found in the Bible, which every child is taught to understand. Why the drama should be censured and the Bible propagated, when there never was anything equally immoral in the former compared with the latter, is, indeed, difficult to understand. And if clergymen were broached upon the subject, there is only one way by which they could get out of the dilemma, and that is by using the same argument that has been used again and again in favour of the drama.

We have a parallel case in literature. The ancient classics are as conspicuous for their immorality as they are for being examples of great literary genius. The comedies of Aristophanes, and others of a kindred nature, are subjects for examination at our universities. These have been edited and sub-edited by reverend and right reverend commentators, and students are yearly ex-



amined in them. Evidently, these learned dignitaries of the Church are under the impression that the minds of the students will not be wrongly influenced by these classic writings and the broad suggestions which they contain. There is a wealth of meaning in this comparison, and, if it be rightly understood to mean that the works of these classical authors are useful to students, then the works of modern dramatists must also be useful.

Perhaps one of the most immoral poems which have been written within recent years is Byron's "Don Juan," and yet as a whole this poem is not any more immoral or hurtful than Tennyson's "In Memoriam." If a few passages in the former were excised it would not be immoral at all. But admitting that it is immoral, in what does its immorality consist? It consists in the general association of incident with what is usually connected with equivocal meanings. The reader, reading between the lines, has no very difficult task in ascertaining what the real meaning of the author is, and the meaning is decidedly not of the purest. But here it ends. The palpable and apparent viciousness too frequently found amalgamated with poems and plays requires no defence, and is deserving of none. But to condemn altogether either poems or plays *ipso facto* on this account is hardly right. It is most emphatically wrong to encourage these performances; they may be hurtful in many cases. But in many other cases they may serve to show a valuable connecting link between the literature which exists and the character of the people who have adopted that literature.



The stage has within recent years undergone a marked change in its character; time has wrought many significant changes, and time will doubtless bring many more. The amount of temptation which at present exists will be lessened as the stage becomes gradually purified. The stage to-day, we are convinced, offers no greater facilities for temptation and its consequences than the drawing-room or the ball-room. It is not the place which makes the temptation, it is the people themselves; and the people of the stage are as good and pure as the people off it, and in very many cases a great deal better. The old worn out cry against the stage has had its day; people have ceased to hum and haw, and shake their heads about matters concerning which they are for the most part almost, if not entirely, ignorant.

The question may now be considered : Does the drama act as an educational force and medium ? The influence exerted by dramatic literature and dramatic representations has always exercised an influence upon the people, acting as a reflection of the particular time in which the drama has existed. This influence in itself is, unquestionably, of an educational value, because it places the reader and the spectator in direct communication with the literary characteristics of the respective epochs in which any literary works flourished. We have a forcible example of this in the plays bequeathed to us of the Restoration period, in which can be clearly seen the popular tastes of the people who supported the drama, and upon whom the drama depended for support. We can observe in the dramatic works of the French School the

peculiar and pervading tone which distinguished the popular vices. And thus in the entire range of literature we can plainly perceive the predominating influence exerted upon the drama by the people.

It is a mistake to suppose that the drama itself has any influence upon a people, except, of course, the momentary emotional impression, which is forgotten in twenty-four hours, and is seldom renewed until the play is again seen. Dramatic works, in their primary influence upon a people or an audience, are only impressions given to the mind, and which soon afterwards leave the mind. But their value in a relative sense is quite a distinct matter, and deserves some consideration. The value of placing human nature before human nature, the one in an abstract sense, the other in the concrete sense, has been repeatedly shown to be useful. The novel which displays an intimate acquaintance with human passion and emotion, and places the reader in a position to judge of the emotions which regulate the heart and the mind—this is, surely, a valuable acquisition. But the novel or the play, or the work of imagination, whatever it may be, which not only does this, but induces the reader, or the spectator, to know himself, or herself, better than before, and thus knowing human nature itself better is a valuable means of education. Education in its least arbitrary sense means, we understand, the general as well as particular impressions given to the mind. The particular impressions are often found valueless, where the general impression has been of considerable utility and importance. It is often, moreover, almost

an impossibility to gain a particular impression where the general impression is not only a sequence but a consequence of the original contact with the thing giving the impression. Thus an audience witnessing *The Profligate*, for example, receive a particular impression in the mere spoken words as they form the dialogue of the play, but they receive, likewise, important and general impressions when the curtain descends after the last act. The general impression, which in this case is more valuable, is one which an audience is not likely to forget, and one which carries with it a lesson and a moral, which no sermon which we have ever heard has placed in so conspicuous and telling a contrast with the workings of passion and the operations of emotion. Here, then, the general impression given by the play is valuable because it serves the very useful purpose of teaching a great moral lesson, which, in many respects, cannot be so forcibly taught in any other form whatever. The fact that this lesson and this moral are told in a manner which carries with it an amount of suggestive immorality is no proof or argument that the object of the play is not good and valuable. We cannot think how anybody who had seen a performance of *The Profligate* would, in consequence of seeing it, become a profligate, or be at all influenced in that direction. On the contrary, we are strongly tempted to believe that the person who had been a profligate before seeing the play would be overcome by the force of the plot and the final consequences of the story, and be made better, if only for a time. It may be set up as an argument that people who have no knowledge

of wickedness should not be tempted to read an exposition on wickedness, or a play containing the elements of wickedness developed and laid bare before them as those good people might thereby become bad. There is unquestionably a certain amount of soundness in this system of argument, which with a class of people has become a favourite method of refutation. When examined, however, it reveals a miserable subterfuge which is quite valueless as a means of argumentative proof. We make bold to affirm there is nobody except a confirmed simpleton or an absolute idiot, who does not understand the ways, and especially the bad ways, of this world after reaching a certain age. That the wickedness of this unfortunate world of ours is, in its abstract sense, made concrete by intuition and instinct, requires no syllogistic inference to show. Observation, intelligence, intercourse with one's fellow creatures, carry with them the means of acquiring, in spite of ourselves, the baseness and the dissimulation of mankind. Every schoolgirl who is not deaf, dumb or blind, knows as well, in the abstract, the wickedness of the world as the veriest profligate knows it in the concrete. And we cannot understand why that schoolgirl would be transformed into a profligate by seeing such a play as *The Profligate* produced upon the stage. The child or the youth either understands wickedness in the abstract, or it does not. It knows as well as the grown up man or woman that it is wrong to steal, swear or blaspheme, and the fact of its hearing these practices condemned will not in the slightest cause the child to commit any of these offences. Then, if from the pulpit these

criminal actions are condemned, why may not similar actions be condemned from the stage?

It is very seldom any play is performed which carries with it a bad or questionable moral lesson. Indeed, the business of the play during late years has been, not to encourage wickedness, but to chastise it and hold it up to derision. There has been, unfortunately, a period in our dramatic annals when nearly everything that was vicious and immoral was held up for admiration, or, at all events, presented to the people in such a manner and under such a systematic cloak of disguise, that it was admired and applauded. We now allude to the comic dramatists of the Restoration. It would, however, be illogical to argue that, because these plays were bad and injurious to the morals, both public and private, all plays are to be condemned. Such has been the line of argument adopted by the majority of those who have seen nothing in our dramatic literature but what was bad and contemptible. They forget the many useful lessons, both social and moral, which have been, and which continue to be, taught from the footlights and from the pages of dramatic literature. They forget that the object of the drama was originally intended as a popular medium by which great sacred truths were disseminated among the people. The drama was, in its primary condition, a means by which the monks taught the people such mysteries and miracles as were contained in biblical creeds. The object of the drama has not changed to any very great extent since then. It has undergone many vicissitudes and alterations, and its object is to-day to give the people representations of truths which,

although they are expounded from the pulpit, are not there developed and sustained before the people with the characteristic effects of theatrical representations.

No lover of art can consistently condemn the theatre and the stage because its past history has been sullied by literature not altogether fit for gentle and refined minds. No literature, whether it be dramatic or otherwise, has been altogether free from the impure tendency of the Middle and succeeding ages; and to condemn that literature would be as foolish as to condemn the Scriptures. Every sensitive man or woman who has any regard for the niceties and refinements of life will always do well to discourage immorality and impurity in every shape and form, but when our drama is now comparatively free from all innuendos and all suggestiveness, there surely should be a lull, for some time, at least, in the whirlwind of passionate invective, which has been employed against the literature of the English drama.

[It may now be reasonably deduced that the drama does educate, and forms, moreover, a very useful and important factor in our educational system.] The development which has taken place during recent years has been owing, in a great measure, to the efforts of Sir Henry Irving, whose whole life has been spent in the cause of the drama's elevation. To others the same praise may be extended. Dramatic authors have been keen in their appreciation of the tendency of the age, and in their works have been careful to avoid those causes from which the drama has so often suffered condemnation. [The most recent element in

our drama has been the introduction of the woman with the past, and the man with the past. The past has been generally, if not always, a bad one, and therefore, as a dramatic representation, it has been chosen as an interesting one. The reason for its being interesting is because it is so common, and because, therefore, many people wish to understand the final end of anyone who has a past. These plays have been christened, and very properly so too, "Society plays." Society in its real bearing upon the drama gives its sanction to whatever affects itself, and nowhere has it been so emphatic in this respect as when it ushered in the play after its own heart.

It would be difficult to define the real meaning of a Society play: a definition is altogether out of the question. But, probably, it would not be far wrong to say that the Society play is one which treats of a Society scandal; at all events, in nearly every play regarded as a Society play, there is always some intrigue which is applicable, more or less, to the upper classes of society. *Moths* is one; *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is another. These plays, although they may be regarded at first sight as tending to destroy the fine moral fibre which we are all supposed to possess (but which, we are afraid, very few of us do possess in that ideal state which we ought), will not be so harshly considered when the lesson which they teach is properly understood. It has now been generally accepted that that only is immoral which tends to place immorality attractively before the minds of the susceptible. The drama of the present day does not do this. It places the villain and the intriguers in

the most despicable contrast to the hero and the heroine, always giving the palm to the virtuous man and woman. If, then, this is the case, the drama, as a work of art, should be patronised and utilised as a means for which it was originally intended, to give a correct representation of the human passions in the manner most consistent with the refinement of the people.

That the drama should be regarded as a means of educational influence there can, then, be little doubt. Whether the drama should be, or can be, made the vehicle for the discussion of psychological problems and metaphysical mysteries, is a question which has been frequently and openly discussed. Whether the stage is the proper place for the examination of cause and effect, or for the enunciation of mental vagaries and phenomena; or whether such conundrums should be left for the psychological student in his class-room or study, we think is only answerable in one way. The theatre is a place for amusement, and not for debating the subtelties of mental phenomena, which even the combined minds of John Stuart Mill and Sir W. Hamilton could but imperfectly solve. That the stage is a platform of huge educational influence and importance is a fact there is no disputing, but few really seriously apply to it for the solution of intricate and endless metaphysical problems. The theatre in its proper sphere is more useful as an open album of historical portraiture, wherein the public may see reflected the face, voice, expression and physique of past generations, of which it can glean little, and that only imperfectly, from the necessarily crude pages of the historical essayist.

These remarks apply most immediately to the drama in its relation to dramatic literature and representation, not only to productions at the Lyceum, but also to the three-act comedy of the lesser satellites of the histrionic firmament.

The comedy of the present age will exhibit to the people of to-day their own forms and features, while a hundred years hence our posterity will see us as we now see the people who were photographed by such men as Sheridan and Goldsmith. This means of impressing upon the everlasting page of historical tradition the peculiar and distinguishing characteristics of ages that come and go, constitutes an invaluable series of consecutive chapters in the world's history, which cannot be over-estimated in its endeavour to portray glimpses of our dramatic and histrionic ancestry; so will posterity in turn be thankful and gracious in their acknowledgments for what has been done and written during this our epoch. The glory of one age is a bright inheritance for its successors, and it is often that the real value of one era is not recognised fully till it has passed away, and leaves only its recollection and impression in the volume of literary and historical *post mortem* examination.

It may, then, be safely concluded that the drama in its legitimate and, therefore, artistic sense is a medium for educational good, and, as such, there can be no valid reason for its condemnation. Ephemeral knowledge of things and especially of an artistic or scientific nature often leads to fallacious conclusions which may be hurtful to the progress, or, at all events, the correct estima-

tion of human genius. Those who either deny or fail to acknowledge, without equivocation, the substantial relationship of the drama to the diffusion of useful knowledge, must be either blindly adhesive to inherent bigotry or altogether inconsistent with the accepted principles and canons of universal education.

CHAPTER V

SOCIETY PLAYS AND THEIR RELATION TO THE DRAMA

A NEW epoch has undoubtedly been introduced into the modern drama by the "Society play." It carries with it the works of an entirely new school, which has been opened at a critical era in the history of our drama. The modern school of English drama is essentially a national institution, and one which is significant of the taste of the public. And nowhere, perhaps, is there such a striking instance of this than in the latest school of comedy—we mean the Society play. There is a peculiar characteristic in this production, containing an element of innovation which, in some respects, is singularly novel and artistic. And the novelty of the play, or, rather, the manner in which it is designed, presents an index of the coming generation of writers of light comedy. The Society play, as it at present exists, is a development in a polite way of the innuendoes of the early comedies, refined and reset to suit the present age. The skill which is employed in moulding a dramatic situation in a crisp and neatly written setting of dialogue seems to us to be the lever and the thumbscrew by which the dramatist of to-day seeks to reach the climax of his dramatic construction. The materials of which the dramatist composes his dramatic structure are those

which can never become wearisome, because they form one of the most important portions of social intercourse, namely, the relationship which exists between the sexes. All the attending circumstances which belong, either naturally or unnaturally, to the many vicissitudes which have during all time been associated with married and single life, offer the dramatist opportunities for plot and the exposition of passion, which are generally welcomed as side lights upon a great and burning topic; a topic which becomes warm by debate and red-hot by the animation of its own intrinsic particles. The dramatists of the Restoration gave us an open page of worldly philosophy upon the same subject that is treated day after day in our homes and police-courts, our novels and our dramas. They viewed the subject according to the complexion which had been given to it by the popular voice. They spoke for the people and to the people, and they succeeded in making that people now appear to have been very wicked and profligate indeed. But society was not so bad as it has often been painted, and the same amount of discretion should be exercised in the examination of the morals of comedy of past generations as we now exercise in the other extravagances which from time to time require our scrutiny.

Like other things, society has improved, and plays have happily improved with it; and to-day we have our literature ornamented with plays which, if they bear a resemblance to the dramas of past generations, are a great deal more artistic in their conception, and are, in many cases, more valuable examples of literary ex-

cellence. The British drama, as far as it affects our social state, is, to a great extent, guarded by the general judgment of the people. The author feels the pulse of his audience, partly by the aid of experience and partly by intuition. The writer's own natural resources are necessarily exercised in the structure and composition, not only of the dialogue and the plot, but also in the surroundings in which the play is at the time cast. Both the dialogue, the plot, and the surroundings are individually, as they form the entire whole, dependent upon the audience for their primary and initial degree of realism and applicability. The acting drama, as it is an appeal to a people, and in some cases to classes of people, has perforce to receive its complexion from the epoch which gives it birth, and its character from the brain and influence of the author. Thus, plays which are great successes to-day may fifty years hence be considered mere obsolete compositions, valuable only as they give their index to the condition of the drama as it now exists. The temperament of the public and the peculiar mood in which they are at the time when a play is produced, is a matter which every author who is desirous of success must be careful to study. All the influences which bear upon our social condition, and which are inseparable from our national state, are reflected in the plays of every era in our history; and the carefully adjusted principles of the author's art and observation are here most signally displayed when he gives us a correct likeness of our manners and customs. The especial manner in which the author manipulates the implements of his work will, of course, depend upon his own insight into

human nature and all the innumerable attributes which are associated with our being and existence. Hence the writer, to succeed in any marked degree at playwriting, must be a student of human nature, and a diligent observer of its laws and fallacies. [Holding the mirror up to Nature is the principle which should actuate all imaginative writing, whether it be simply speculative or fictional.]

The Society play, in its extensive application to our drama, has made an attempt, and a very respectable attempt, to reflect phases of our Society and its characteristics in a dramatic representation of incidents which are familiar to most people interested in the movements of Society.

Indeed, the Society play has been the means of giving a sensitive medium to our drama, a medium with which it connects the higher and more ideal state of the drama with the broad comedy of the old schools, and gives, also, an enlargement and development of mental emotions which have not been previously analysed. For this we owe much both to Mr. A. W. Pinero, Mr. Sidney Grundy, and those who have followed them. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has given several examples of his brilliant qualities as an author of thoroughly good plays. These three playwrights occur to us as being the founders of the school which has given us the Society play properly so called. *The Profligate* is one of the most powerful and moving plays of the century. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, and other plays from Mr. Pinero's pen, are examples of this author's keen insight into the dark recesses of the human heart. The exposition in these works of the

workings of material passion gives us a reflection of ourselves as we are, and as we frequently think and act. These are studies of human character which will live, doubtless, as long as our language. Great practical and religious lessons may be taught and learnt by the Society play, and, indeed, were such not the case its value would be greatly diminished. Its moving force and penetrating influence would be, perhaps, lost if it existed in any other shape. At all events, it shows us Nature undisguised, except through the thin veil of art, which just serves to hide the deep scars and sores which are, unfortunately, too painfully present on the body of our social system. If a great crime has been committed, or a great wrong done, it is not for us to hide it or put the guilt where it cannot be examined. We should rather look closely into it, and study its impression upon ourselves. Therefore, if it be granted, and we think it must, that the Society play gives us an unexaggerated reflection of our social system in some particular respects, it follows, if we adhere to deductive reasoning, that its influence is useful and good. The fault would rather lie if the author, instead of attempting to give us an impression of the existing state, gave us, rather, an imaginative state, worse than that which really is. But as long as an author adheres to the real, in this connection at all events, his course will be so far secure, and undoubtedly beneficial.

In no play, and certainly in no Society play, have we noticed any attempt on the part of the author to secure the final object of his initial undertaking. And there appears with the comedy of the present day, and especially in the imaginative comedy, a desire to introduce

a story depending for its development upon an intrigue which may have happened before the play begins, and which is unfolded as it proceeds. This idea is centered most realistically, not only in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, but in all the plays of the same school which have since appeared. *Sowing the Wind* is another example. We remember seeing the announcement of this play in London when it first appeared. It had a good run, and yet very little was said about it. The newspapers were, for the most part, silent as to the progress it was making in the public favour, and we came to the conclusion that there could not be very much backbone in it. It was not till we were in Cork that we saw it at the Opera House there by a good touring company, with Miss Lena Ashwell in the principal part. The cause of its success was then easily understood. The novel rendering of an old dramatic situation was carefully worked out by Mr. Grundy with exquisite skill and workmanlike finish. There was the master's hand in every line of it. [The immoral basis, which keeps the public judiciously quiet, but which fills the theatre, was consummately introduced and interwoven in a highly dramatic manner.] This, we believe, is the reason why the play had the success it deserved. Mr. Grundy recognised the necessity of placing upon paper an analysis of a great story, and in doing so he was judicious in giving it the tone and morals of a recent age. However much a dramatist may admire his own art, he must also exercise a partiality for the tastes and distastes of the public for which he caters. The successful dramatist soon finds this out. In fact, his success is the best proof that he has already found

it out. He then acts upon the broad and commercial value of popular applause. He ceases for the while to regard art so seriously, or, at all events, that Utopian state of art about which young dramatists rave unceasingly. When they do make a hit it is generally because they have found it unprofitable to adhere to their mystical views on "Art for art's sake," and, being sensible for once, turn their attention to the more cosmopolitan labour of pleasing the public. Finding that this succeeds they congratulate themselves as clever fellows, and inwardly determine to adopt in the future the best thing that pays.

This is exactly the principle upon which the Society play is constructed. An immoral intrigue is made the origin of the plot, and around this the dramatist weaves his thread of narrative, balanced here and there by intervals of passionate appeal and speech-making, which he knows from experience, and an intimate acquaintance with an audience, will form a good and telling situation. He finds, too, from his commercial instincts, that a plot which is in every sense real, and of daily occurrence in ordinary life, will be best likely to succeed. Knowing, moreover, that it is the real, and not the ideal, which pays, he introduces a theme and a situation in which any man and woman could easily be placed, and, indeed, a situation in which men and women are placed every hour of the day. Take Mr. Pinero's play, *The Profligate*, for example. There are situations in this piece which are not only possible, but exceedingly probable. The writer has made the narrative consecutive and consistent to suit the pur-

pose of stage representation ; but, in the most straggling and fragmentary arrangement, the play would have been intensely interesting. And why ? Simply because the idea of the author has been a plain and straightforward reflection of real life—an image before which the mirror has been held up, and Nature, in her nakedness, exposed with unerring accuracy and precision. All this, then, is art engaged in the presentation of the really natural. We think now—and we always have thought, despite the modern theory about ideality and all that sort of thing—that the drama of the future, as in the past, will depend largely upon the dramatist's skill in revealing the truly natural. A dramatist may try to idealise Nature in her dependence upon natural laws and customs, but to attempt anything irrelevant to Nature's own self will never, we are convinced, render the drama popular, and certainly not profitable. The patrons of the drama are always anxious to see themselves reflected as they are, as they might be, and, in all probability, may be. They wish to see a picture of truth—breathing, speaking out of the canvas, feeling and acting as they themselves feel and act. We have had this systematically worked out in *John-a-Dreams*, by Mr. Haddon Chambers. In this play the author has done his best to depict a natural sequence of events which might happen at any time.

The essential element in all drama must be truth, fidelity, and precision, and these elements must, in turn, be revealed in a series of consecutive scenes and acts digested by the skill of the dramatist. The Society play, a welcome addition to our dramatic literature, is the

newest and latest experiment in support of this contention—a contention which has, we are glad to say, been generally accepted as a rule and first principle.

The distinctive merit which the Society play seems to us to possess, independent of its endeavour to add novelty or innovation to our dramatic epoch, is the precedent it affords to the rising generation of dramatic authors. The pioneer play is generally looked upon askance for the first term of its existence, at least, and it is not till it has fairly gripped the public that authors begin to imitate, and managers to encourage it. The patronage of the public is, doubtless, the first and most important consideration, and the weight of their opinion is of more consequence than the combined efforts of half-a-dozen leading newspaper critics. Perhaps the most melodramatic Society play is *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, but this was not a pioneer play in the absolute sense of the term. *The Profligate* was more a pioneer play than the other, and, no doubt, in a great measure prepared the people for it. Yet *The Profligate* as a play was dissimilar to *Tanqueray*, but they, nevertheless, bore a common resemblance in the fact that they touched upon a theme closely connected with the recognised moral code of nineteenth century society. To Mr. Pinero belongs the credit of handling this subject in a broad and comprehensive manner, and, although it must be agreed he has treated the subject in a harsh manner, yet he has given us a crisp and scholarly sketch of social life as it may exist, not only in his own imagination, but in that of everyone who sees or reads his plays.

It may, perhaps, be objected that the subject upon which *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is constructed is unhealthy, and, in a sense, false to nature. If by "unhealthy" is meant that the morality which this play contains is not fit for the general public to hear or experience, we must beg leave to differ. Morality is not interested in the question at all. If a people are to be influenced by a play, they will be influenced by anything. We do not mean for a moment to undervalue the influence of the play, and of the theatre. Our conviction that they are both useful is far too strong for that, but we do mean to say that the morals expounded in such plays as these which have been designated Society plays, will never materially injure anyone. Our candid opinion is this, that the person who thoroughly understands, or thinks he understands, the analysis of morality, and consequently of immorality as applied to the stage, knows full well both what is wrong and what is right. That such a person in his proper senses could be injured by seeing any Society play performed is beyond our comprehension. On the other hand, we do not think that such plays should be selected by fond parents for their children's amusement, when their minds are still impressionable, and their judgment improperly seasoned. It is time enough to let young men and women into the secrets of life's wickedness when time and experience have led the way. And any young woman (we won't speak of the young man) who in her simplicity of heart and mind, sees such plays as *The Profligate* or *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* will have a most excellent opinion of the

world if she does not discover therein a great deal of wickedness. When she finds that such baseness does exist, why, she must be a model young lady if she does not open her eyes very wide, and look round upon everybody with the utmost astonishment and bewilderment. However, for these good young people such plays were never intended, and it would be a very sorry thing if they were. Those who make a practice of seeing them are past, far past, the impressionable stage, and do not fear the influence of "the woman with a past."

The morality of the nineteenth century, and more especially the morality of the latter half in which we live, is most decidedly of a progressive nature. The age signifies progress, but it does not signify that it should be more unusual than its predecessors. What it does signify, and what we intend these remarks to signify, is not to place the public in the path of immorality, but to place them in the best position of meeting it and combating its devilish ingenuity to seduce our better instincts. It may be objected that such plays as we have enumerated are not calculated to assist many in this design. That is just exactly what we do mean. People must be taught what is wrong, as well as what is right, otherwise they would be playing at blind-man's-buff, groping in the dark, falling over each other's feet, not knowing, in a word, where or when to turn. It is always a lame excuse to give for falling into error, that we did not know it was wrong. The people should be taught what is wrong, and, so long as they are taught this useful acquirement, it is then their own fault if they

do wrong. We feel absolutely assured that the criminal will no more be made a saint by intercourse with all that is good, than the saint will be made a criminal by intercourse with all that is bad. Macaulay has put the case on the most reasonable basis when he declared that, "The virtue which the world wants is a healthful virtue, not a valetudinarian virtue, a virtue which can expose itself to the risks inseparable from all spirited exertion, not a virtue which keeps out of the common air for fear of infection, and eschews the common food as too stimulating. It would be, indeed, absurd to attempt to keep men from acquiring those qualifications which fit them to play their part in life with honour to themselves and advantage to their country, for the sake of preserving a delicacy which cannot be preserved; a delicacy which a walk from Westminster to the Temple is sufficient to destroy."

Macaulay was proving why such comedies as the Athenian of ancient and the Restoration of modern times should be read by all whose duty it is to be equipped with a liberal and classical education. In the same way, and by exactly the same process of reasoning, we might show why the comedies or tragedies labelled "Society plays," which contain questionable morality, should be, or, at least, may be, witnessed by all who are desirous of watching the current of progress of the literary world of to-day. We say literary because the drama is a part, and a very considerable part, of our literature; and knowledge of the one is incomplete if not accompanied by a knowledge of the other.

We do not in the least degree attempt to set up an

apology for equivocal morality, either on the stage or off it. We believe, and we think we are right in believing, that the stage and its morality affects the general public very little. But we do believe that the public affect the morality of the stage. There is, then, something akin to incongruity in a public creating something which it afterwards refuses to recognise. It is something like a parent disowning its own offspring. No, the morality of the legitimate stage is as good, and better, than it ever has been; and we know of no justifiable reason why its dramas should be tabooed, or their teaching scoffed at, any more than the preacher who dissects crime on Sundays for our moral and social welfare. Much heated discussion was recently sustained in the *Times* concerning the morality of *John-a-Dreams*, a good type of the Society play. It ended where it began. Goody-goody people who held hazy notions about the stage, and enthusiasts who waxed ambiguous and intolerant, swelled a bulk of valueless correspondence, which, if at all interesting, was so on account of the fact that it made a great deal of noise about nothing. We have very rarely read so much correspondence which resulted in so little information being bestowed upon what at first appeared to be a debatable question.

The history of English comedy from its origin will give us some idea of the various stages through which this vexed question has passed. It will serve our purpose to glance at the development rapidly; and if we can discern the causes which distinguished each change, it will be sufficient for our purpose.

The growth and development of the school of comedy

is an element in our drama which must always constitute a highly interesting study. From the antique drollery of Ben Jonson to the refined and sparkling wit of Sheridan an album of fun and humour contrasts favourably with the parallel vitality of tragedy, and, in our own day, of melodrama. The various schools of comedy which have, during successive generations, punctuated the cadence of humour, are coincident in many respects with the age which gave them birth. Thus, as a consequence, we notice a marked difference between the comedy introduced by succeeding epochs in the history of our drama. A play of Beaumont and Fletcher shows, upon comparison, many changes from a work by Wycherley and his school—a change, indeed, which was brought about by the difference of “manners, institutions, laws,” which gave their complexion to things dramatic. This point cannot be exemplified or illustrated more forcibly than by the perusal of the comedies of the Restoration period and by contrasting them with their predecessors and successors—a contrast which will exhibit a change in the tone and morals of society. The morals of society are, indeed, generally to be found reflected in the dramatic specimens of which the respective age has been the producer; that age gives, as it were, an index and a purpose to the dramatic taste, and the patrons of the drama are found to give their patronage to the dramatic fare which will appease their temporary appetite. That appetite will change assuredly, but the drama will not affect it; but the change will affect the drama. Nothing in literature generally, and in dramatic literature most especially, is

more significant than this parallel change—a change which we must notice in our own time. The looseness of the morals of the Restoration required or suggested a looseness in the dramatic literature, and the time produced authors who were willing to serve up the appetising dish. Farquhar, who, although superior to Wycherley in morality, was inferior in dramatic skill, followed in the footsteps of his leader, and gave to the world comedies which might then have been considered decent, but which are on all hands now regarded as obscene. Passages in Congreve and Farquhar might be quoted which would cause one's hair to stand on end, but which, in their day, may not have caused so much as a wrinkle of the brow. The licentiousness which was the natural consequence of the Cromwellian dynasty, broke out under Charles II. in such a manner as would have made the Puritans of the Protectorate stagger against a door-post for support. Under Charles they were signals for applause and approbation. As time went on, a narrower sphere of action was allowed the dramatist, and he had to confine his indecencies to a circumlocution of references, which, although not so important, were scarcely less dangerous or evident. It had become a matter of taste as to whether an idea or object should be designated by a noun substantive or by a roundabout reference; it was now, in the later school of comedy, regarded as more artistic to avoid a bald ejaculatory expletive, and only refer to it circumspectly. This means of satisfying the popular impulse became, in short, one of the marks by which true comedy was recognised, and the author who could

best succeed in this was the recipient of the distinction. Comedy, pure and simple, soon became the order of the day, anything more serious than *The Plain Dealer* or *The Constant Couple* being tabooed as dull and monotonous. A striking feature of the comedy of the modern school was the treatment of the characters and the novelty of the situations. The hero of the piece was made a libertine, whom all the boys in the gallery cheered to the echo, and the heroine was an impudent miss, who, in our day, would be looked upon as a horror in any class of society where the word decent is known. The change from this to the more refined banter of Goldsmith and Sheridan was gradual, almost imperceptible. When the latest school of comedy, that of H. J. Byron and Robertson, afterwards embellished by Mr. Pinero, was introduced, the critics were full of comparisons, and almost again set the public a-longing for what they had almost forgotten. Then another class of playwrights sprang up and began to give plays which were really hardly superior in tone to those of Wycherley. These were at once condemned, only to be succeeded by others of a more fatal character. Previously irregularities were confined to single men and women on the stage. Afterwards, intrigues were associated with people living under the bond of matrimony. Whether these are less injurious, from a moral point of view, than the others which we have enumerated, is a question which can receive only one answer. They are just as hurtful, and under certain circumstances a great deal more so.

Recent authors have taken pains to place a high

moral in the framework of their plays, and in many cases to give a noble view of life, although shown by means exhibiting the weakness of frail Nature. Here is art, and art usefully applied—occupied in refuting the oft-repeated query, “Should goody-goody people go to the theatre?” Unquestionably, plays of a certain class keep people from witnessing them who would otherwise go to the theatre and enjoy the amusement. But, on the other hand, a far greater number of people will frequent the theatre just on account of the questionable character of the performance. We remember, some years ago, the clergy of Dublin forbidding the people to visit the Gaiety during the run of a play by a dramatist still living. What was the consequence? The theatre was full to overflowing every night, and only for this advertisement the piece would, in all probability, have been an ordinary draw. As it was, the curiosity of the people was roused, and they went. Perhaps they would not go again, but in all probability they would moan over the play to all their friends, and they, in turn, would book seats just to see if it really was so wicked, and so on. The authors themselves must be the purifiers of the comedy of the present day (if it requires any purification), but, if they do not, they will have plenty of supporters who will be ready to pay to see anything—well, questionable.

There is such a thing in this world as a false morality, which has often found its way into our theatres and given cause for much discussion which, as far as can be gleaned, has ended in nothing except a great deal of critical verbiage which really means nothing. Many people are always on the look out for what it would

appear they are only too ready to discover when once they do drop upon anything which, by any means, they can distort into double meanings and mismeanings and what not. They are then satisfied we are all going to the dogs, and that the theatre and all connected with it is the prime mover. But if people of this disposition went to the theatre with better intentions we would hear less of the immorality of the stage and more about the value and amusement to be obtained from the practice of frequenting our theatres.

CHAPTER VI

PLAYWRITING

It is necessary that the drama, in its literary signification, should receive an impression of systematic classification, but very few writers who have attempted anything of the kind have as yet succeeded in satisfying the critical analysis of literary precision. As a matter of fact, there can be no satisfactory method of classifying the drama; at any rate, the English have none. There does exist, among the dramatic literature of Germany, illustrations and devices by which this may be attained, but no British writer has given any elaborate study to the question. For the working playwright this is, perhaps, no very serious consequence. If his play is a success it matters very little to him what name is applied to it. Nevertheless, occasions arise when even the playwright would find it convenient to indicate the character of his production by a single word instead of by a long circumlocution; while for critic and manager the defect is a matter of never-ceasing embarrassment and perplexity.

The growth of the drama in all civilised countries has resulted in the development of two classes of plays, distinguished by certain general marks of divergence. One class deals with the serious aspects of life, and is called *tragedy*; the other with the laughable aspects, and is called *comedy*. In the early history of the stage, while

the dramatic forms were simple, and criticism as yet undeveloped, the terms above given would be used with accuracy and significance; but, as the development of the drama continued, the two classes showed a tendency, in some cases, to merge one into one another, until the distinction lost much of its earlier importance, while the rise of formal criticism created arbitrary standards where no essential distinction existed. To illustrate—the tragedies of Æschylus deal solely with the serious side of life; the comedies of Aristophanes solely with its follies. In the tragedies of Shakespeare we find abundance of comedy, and in his comedies, especially in the *Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *As You Like It*, scenes that might well form part of a tragedy. For examples of the influence in giving arbitrary names, mention may be made of Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Corneille's *Le Cid*.

Notwithstanding the truth of the facts just stated, the traditional distinction between tragedy and comedy must always be a valuable one for the critic. In the first place, it is a natural distinction, a direct result of the two-fold character of life itself, and, in the second place, it is already thoroughly impressed upon the popular consciousness. Whatever classifications are made, therefore, it will be advisable to use the common division into comedy and tragedy, as a convenient starting-point for the discussion.

The general character of tragedy, as that species of drama which presents the serious aspects of life, has already been suggested. As it is the business of the drama in general to portray the clash of individual interests, it is the peculiar function of tragedy to repre-

sent this conflict as terminating fatally, that is, as resulting generally in the death of one or more of the contending characters, or, at any rate, as involving a struggle of a stern and momentous character, from which escape is possible only through the intervention of extraordinary agencies. Hence tragedy calls for characters of unwonted strength of will and depth of seriousness, and an elevated style of diction generally rare.

Comedy is the converse of tragedy. In it the conflict is always reconciled at the end, and all disasters averted. The conflict itself, however serious it may seem during the progress of the play, turns out at the end to have been a case of much ado about nothing. The characters are either not serious in their aims, or, if they are, the objects for which they have been striving are shown to be worthless. In comedy, somebody is nearly always represented as pursuing a bubble. At the close the bubble bursts, and, with good-natured submission, the deluded pursuer acknowledges his folly. It follows that, while in tragedy the characters are mostly taken from the higher walks of life, in comedy the average man is the central figure. The style is familiar and colloquial, and generally precise.

From the preceding paragraphs it appears that the principal lines of distinction between tragedy and comedy are to be sought for in the theme, the characters, the plot and the style.

By the theme of a play is meant the problem, social, moral, political, religious, psychological, or whatever it may be, which the play presents for the consideration of the spectator.] It is generally agreed that the drama

should not be didactic, that is, should not directly teach anything, but this by no means precludes the dramatist from bringing before us questions of momentous human interest, and so treating them that the rightful solution is suggested, if not demonstrated. It should not be inferred, however, from what has been said that the playwright must select a theme at the outset, and deliberately build his play upon it. He may be conscious of his theme, or he may work unconsciously and find with astonishment, when his work is over, that a theme has grown up under his hand unbidden. A thoughtful man, with well defined views of the problem of human existence, can hardly present any picture of life or society without giving it somewhere the impress of his own thought, and making it somehow the reflex of his own *ideals*. The theme in comedy is naturally of less importance than in tragedy, and in the light forms may not appear at all. Still, even here a master hand will manage to suggest in a striking manner current or political problems.

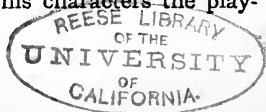
We may now attempt to give an answer or definition to the query, "What constitutes a play?" In the broadest sense, according to Hennequin, a play is a complete and unified story of human life acted out on the stage in a series of motivated incidents, so arranged as to excite the greatest amount of interest and pleasure in the spectator by means of novelty, variety, contrast, suspense, surprise, climax, humour, and pathos.

" This is not intended, of course, for an exact scientific definition; but, as it covers the essential features of all plays produced at the present day, it is much better

adapted for our purpose than any of the definitions which have come down to us from antiquity. We shall now proceed to examine the many elements of which a play is usually composed. First, let us consider the "story." This is the first and most essential feature in the play. It may be very simple, or it may be very complex. It may be no more than this: John wants to marry Susan, but cannot because Dick has told her that John was in love with Mary. John discovers Dick's villainy and marries Susan. Many successful plays have had no better formula than this. On the other hand, the story may be a confused tangle of ingenious complications, as difficult to separate as a Chinese puzzle. In any case, there must be a story of some sort—somebody must steal, or kill, or deceive, or wed—or there can be no play. The first thing, then, that the playwright must provide himself with is a good story, or, better still, a collection of good stories. Every story that has any value for dramatic purposes may be reduced to the following formula:—

A. (standing for one or more characters) is trying to achieve some purpose. A. is opposed to B. (representing one or more characters), who tries to prevent A. from carrying out his design. After a series of incidents, in which first one and then the other seems to have the upper hand, A. finally succeeds in frustrating the designs of B., and either accomplishes the end sought, or is killed. ^H

As the story is one of human life, it treats of the actions of men and women, and in consequence has characters. In the selection of his characters the play-



Taken bodily from Deceit

wright has an almost unlimited range; but four requirements must be observed:

1. The characters must be suited to the story; the story to the characters. 2. The characters must be clearly distinguished one from another. 3. The characters must be self-consistent. 4. The characters must be so selected and arranged that each one may seem as a foil to another. (The incidents of the story must seem to grow out of the nature of the characters, and, on the other hand, the incidents must react on the characters to produce the result arrived at.) In the *Merchant of Venice*, the trial scene is the direct outcome of Shylock's avarice and race prejudice. Put generous Othello in Shylock's place, and the trial scene would be an absurdity. Equally absurd, on the other hand, would it have been to represent the keen-witted Shylock as believing in Iago's veracity.

As in real life no two persons are exactly alike, so in a play each character must be marked off from every other, down to the least important. A skilful dramatist will manage to do this by a single touch. Thus the one line in which Shakespeare characterises Robin Ostler, "Never joy'd since the price of oats rose," distinguishes him from all other characters. The distinguishing marks and manners should be real elements of character, not mere tricks of dress, manner or speech. A set form of words put always into the mouth of the same character is called a gag. Each personage must be made to say and do exactly what is appropriated to his character. A flagrant violation of this rule is found in Boucicault's *London Assurance*

(as commonly performed), where that selfish old reprobate, Sir Harcourt, gives at the close a speech teeming with lofty sentiments and exalted morality. As Aristotle very justly points out, a character to be consistent with itself must often be drawn as inconsistent. An inconsistent woman, for example, would be self-consistent only if portrayed in all her characteristic inconsistency.

As will be shown later, contrast is one of the instruments of dramatic effect. An avaricious character, like Shylock, stands out much more vividly when a generous nature like Antonio's slants over against it as a foil. Plays composed entirely of virtuous characters would be insufferable. The characters should be so selected and arranged, that in each scene the prominent characteristics of each may be made more prominent by contrast with the others of the same group. The characters, as they are depicted by the imagination of the author, must be rendered individually dependent upon one another's actions, and this dependency, and final co-operation, is imparted to the characterisation by the circumstances attending the development of the story. This gives completeness. By a complete story is meant one that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A story is complete when it is told so that the listener does not need to ask what happened before it began, nor care to ask what happened after it concluded. When we have heard a complete story through to the end, we know all that there is to tell. When a play, like *Othello*, for instance, has come to a close, the spectator feels that he has

been put in possession of every fact about Othello and the other characters that he needs to know. No additional knowledge of Othello's career previous to the opening of the play would afford him any satisfaction, nor does he care to know what happens after the curtain falls. A remarkable, but successful, violation of this requirement may be found in Sardou's *Daniel Rochat*, in which the curtain falls just before the decisive step is taken which would relieve the spectators' suspense. Whether atheism or religion is master of the situation is a problem left for the audience to solve. It need hardly be said that no playwright of ordinary powers would dare try this bold expedient, or having tried it, would stand one chance in a hundred of succeeding. With an incomplete story, the spectator is left unsatisfied; he wants to know what happened before the play opened, in order to understand what occurred during its progress; but he is not satisfied with its close, and wants to know what is going to happen next.

The story must be unified. This has been variously interpreted; but the most sensible view is that all the incidents of the stage must be made to cluster about a single central animating idea. The purpose must be seen to run throughout the whole series of incidents. If there are two series of incidents they must be woven together, that, at the end of the story, it will be evident that one could not have taken place without the other. Although of little value, we shall give here what are understood as the "Unities." They are three in number, and belong to the French school of criticism of the

seventeenth century. They are : 1. The unity of action ; 2. The unity of time ; 3. The unity of place. The narrowest of French critics understood the unity of action to mean that the play should have a single event and a single hero. Following an ambiguous statement in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the French critics restricted the time of the play to twenty-four hours. An extension of thirty hours was barely permitted. The unity of place required that there be no change of scene during the entire play.

It is important to notice that these three unities, in their historical meaning, were the invention of French criticism. From this source they were adopted for a time by English playwrights. At the present time the terms no longer have any meaning, save in their historical sense, when speaking of plays written under the influence of the old rules of criticism. No one pretends to regard them at the present day. It is still convenient, however, to speak of the unity of action, not in the old sense, but with the meaning already explained.

Unless the story be one that can be acted out on the stage by men and women it is worthless for dramatic purposes. It is not enough that it can be told or narrated ; it must be *acted*. It must find its natural expression in those movements of the human body which tell of passion, emotion and resolve. It must be a story capable of being told in dagger-thrusts, kisses, frowns, sighs, laughter, caresses, eating, fighting and dying. If it can be expressed in dumb-show, like *L'Enfant Prodigue*, then it satisfies at least one requirement of dramatic construction ; if it cannot, it may make a good novel or a good poem, but it will never make a successful drama.

The story must also be told in accordance with the conventions and limitations of the stage as it exists. A story, in which a dozen people are represented throughout the entire narrative, may be very pleasant in the telling, but it will never do for the stage, where there must be entrances and exits to give life and variety to the scene. A story of the war, in which a tree is cut in two by a canon-ball, and throws a spy, who has been hiding in it, headlong through the window-sash of a house, may be the most delightful sort of reading, and yet be wholly impracticable for stage production.

The story when acted out upon the stage takes the form of a series of incidents. Not every series of incidents, however, will constitute a play. The incident must be motived. This means that the cause of every incident must be apparent in some incident that has preceded it, and serves as a motive for it. Every event must be seen to grow naturally out of what has gone before, and to lead naturally to what comes after. An incident which is introduced arbitrarily, simply for effect, is only clap-trap.

Above all, the work of the dramatist must both interest and please if he would have it successful. This is, indeed, the fundamental law of the modern drama. It is not forbidden the dramatist to point a moral or discuss a social problem; but these are side issues, extra dramatic effects, which he must undertake at his own risk. His first and his last business as a playwright is to tell such a story, and to tell it in such a way that his audience will be forced to listen, and listening, cannot fail to be delighted. The story should be fresh and

original. The old, worn-out themes have been written threadbare, and something fresh is always hailed with satisfaction. Nothing wearies us like the stale anecdote—a joke which has become vapid by over-repetition. It should be the playwright's endeavour to exert his originality, if he have any, in the construction of new incidents. There have been cases, however, where an old story, retold in a new and more attractive way, has given renewed pleasure. But when an author sets out only to regild, as it were, an old piece of furniture, he must do so with circumspection. If an old story is told again, it should possess some new element, if only to give it an indirect suspicion of novelty. Along with novelty of design, there should be an accompaniment of variety and contrast. Too much of one subject or of one kind of incident is apt to weary and become monotonous. There should be plenty of quick changes from pathos to humour, from wit to eloquence. A scene between the comic lovers may be followed by one between the hero and heroine. The entire play should be made to change as many times as possible, preserving all the while the sequence of events and the virtue of probability. Variety not only destroys monotony, but it secures also the powerful effect of contrast. A piece of humour is twice as effective if it follows an instant of pathos, or even of commonplace. Brilliant dialogue seems doubly brilliant after a monologue. But by far the most important means of arousing interest is by suspense. Keep a listener in doubt as to what is coming, and he cannot help but listen. [Suspense is, in a word, the nervous system of the drama.] In some form or another, it must exist throughout the entire

progress of the story. At various points of the play, generally at the close of each act, it may be partially relieved ; but it must always be done in such a way as to give rise to new suspense, or to leave one or two particulars still unsettled. Not until the last moment of the story should every item of doubt be cleared away. This does not, however, mean that the audience should not invariably be told what is coming. It is a curious fact of human nature that we await an event with no less interest, and sometimes with greater interest, when we know exactly what is coming, than when we are left in ignorance of its nature, provided the story is told in such a way as to arouse our sympathy. This is one reason why the best plays may be heard again and again without losing any fascination for us.

If the dramatist be sure of his powers, it is a very effective device to take the audience into his confidence. Let them see just what is coming, and depend upon his skill in telling the story to keep them in a state of suspense. A successful play written upon this plan is sure of a much longer life than one which depends on mere surprise through unexpected incidents.

Nevertheless, surprise is one of the most potent of stage effects. An audience may be startled or shocked into a state of interest when no other device would be of any avail. Surprises are most valuable in light comedies, which sometimes consist of little more than a succession of startling incidents. In more serious plays, too sudden surprises give the story an unpleasantly abrupt and freaky character. The surprise in such cases must be, in a manner, prepared for ; the

audience must be made to have a dim foreboding of the impending disaster, while its exact nature is left a matter of surprise.

A regular increase of force and interest, culminating in a strong situation, is called a *climax*. A dramatic story should be full of climaxes from beginning to end. Every act should have several lesser ones scattered through it, and should invariably end with one of greater importance. Towards the end of the play should occur the great climax (in the technical sense of the word), the point at which the interest of the play reaches its highest stage. All the incidents leading up to a striking situation should be arranged in the form of the climax, growing gradually in force until the last is reached. The situation concluding a climax generally takes the form of a tableau, or stage picture. The technical climax should be carefully distinguished from the catastrophe, which last, in tragedies especially, is often the strongest situation of the play.

Except in the lighter sort of comedy, the two elements of humour and pathos are always introduced in the modern drama. No one any longer thinks of writing pure tragedy for the stage, and, on the other hand, the most saleable comedies are those which have a few touches in them of genuine pathos.

But the question may be asked, Where do stories come from? How are they manufactured? how do they strike the authors? Well, there are no rules for collecting stories; they must come from observation in life, from conversation, from reading, from old newspaper scraps—anywhere, in a bit of life vividly told,

may lurk the germ of a first-rate dramatic story. Many dramatists will confess to having had their best ideas suggested while reading old and forgotten novels. Many more, if they could be made to confess, would acknowledge their indebtedness to French *brochures*. A good story, wherever it comes from, is a priceless gem, and the playwright who has a note-book full of them has the beginnings of a valuable stock-in-trade.

The best stories for dramatic purposes require few pre-suppositions, and those of a character capable of being implied rather than demanding explicit statement. The story must, of course, be of such a character that it can be symmetrically developed under the dramatic form. The drama is a regular, orderly growth, and neither a story which consists of a series of episodes following one another like knots in a string, nor one which shoots suddenly upwards to a resplendent climax, and as suddenly goes out in utter darkness, is of any value for purposes of dramatisation.

A word as to adaptation. There are two ways or methods of adaptation; first, by dramatising a novel, and secondly, by the translation and alteration of a play written in another language. Not every novel can be successfully adapted, for the reason that its success may arise from features which do not admit of transference to the stage. The first point to notice in every case is the action. If the interesting portions of the novel depend for their interest, not on what the characters say, but on what they do, the novel probably has dramatic possibilities. As for adapting French, or any play or work written in another language, this is, for

the beginner, almost a hopeless task. Except in rare instances, nothing but a large experience with the conventions of the British stage, and the demands of the British public, will enable the adapter to decide what portions of the foreign production will be effective. Some plays need only to be translated, with a little cutting here and there; others, and by far the greatest number, must be absolutely reconstructed, the characters altered and renamed, the minor incidents created anew, the whole play denationalised and worked over on the British plan.

Not least necessary is the knowledge of the dramatist concerning the peculiar line of acting which distinguishes leading actors and actresses, and theatrical people generally. This knowledge will be indispensable when he comes to casting, or, at any rate, assist at the casting of his play. He must know that Mr. William Terriss would not play a part evidently written for a comedian like Mr. Harry Nicholls; and that the line of acting adopted by Sir Henry Irving is altogether distinct from that of Mr. J. L. Toole. The dramatist may have to write a play sometimes for a particular company. He may have all his leading people in his mind's eye, as Mr. Pinero had Mrs. Patrick Campbell in his mind's eye when he was writing *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. This process has both its advantage and disadvantage. It may be easier to write a play to fit some people when the author thoroughly understands their powers and capabilities; but it will be easier for the author to give free scope to his individual style of composition when he knows he is unfettered by any systematic arrangement

to adhere in his characterisation to the formalities of any one actor or actress in particular.

It is interesting to notice the habits which dramatists have with regard to their writing and the mode of their composition. They all seem to vary and have methods of their own. Mr. Grundy once declared that he had no set method of working, and generally allowed the fit to take him ; but, when once he was seized by it, he worked away steadily until he was tired out. He rarely adds anything to what he has already written, but he uses the pruning-knife very freely. He thinks out the plan first and the process by which the plot will be naturally developed, then he thinks how it can be dramatically developed. He used, he says, to plan out all the exits and entrances before he began to write, but he now finds it more advisable to refrain from going into such detail, because, "when he has thoroughly warmed up, the details arrange themselves more naturally than he could have arranged them beforehand." Mr. A. W. Pinero says he thinks of some people, and lives with them until they prove interesting or otherwise. In the latter case he cuts them ; but, if their natures, manners, peculiarities, resolve themselves into a story, he tries to ascertain if that story will shape into dramatic form. If yes, he constructs his play, but only act by act, the second act depending upon the first, the third on the second, and so forth. He makes very few notes or plan of dialogue, as he finds himself often checked by them ; but the whole matter, he says, is settled in his mind—or he fancies it is, sometimes to find it isn't. He writes in the evening when there is quiet, and does not dine.

CHAPTER VII

AMATEUR THEATRICALS AND AMATEUR ACTORS

WE were almost about to close these pages and bring this little book to a conclusion, when we suddenly remembered we had forgotten an item of no inconsiderable status and notoriety. The amateur actor will not be ignored ; his vocation, as far as it goes, is a matter of some importance, and, therefore, to pass him over would be sheer bad taste, to say the least of it. Why should he not have his allowance of space as well as those who may now sneer at him and his work ? Let them sneer, my young friend ; their sneers will do you no harm and cannot possibly do them any good. They were amateurs themselves once, and perhaps you may rise to the same level as they. Who knows but that you may not be another Kean, Macready, Siddons, or Bernhardt ? At all events, you can try. But before commencing, or, if you have already commenced, it will not be any harm—in fact, we think it will do you a great deal of good—if you read the following, as well as the preceding pages, and then think the matter over in your own mind seriously. Remember, or rather realise, that amateur acting is very nearly akin to professional acting. The difference is only in the quality, and, after all, quality is not a very important point—at least, so many amateurs think. But it is a very great point, and one about which you should exer-

cise the utmost possible solicitude. Then if you are an amateur, don't run on the stage without some preliminary knowledge of the subject—don't for goodness sake imagine you cannot be taught anything! You have everything to learn, and if you are earnest you will do well to learn all you can. One of the best means of learning "how to act" is to go to the best theatres and watch the best actors and actresses "as they do it." Look at them closely and see for yourself how they make their effects, watch how they enter and leave the stage; how they conduct themselves when they are saying nothing; how they do nothing; how they assist one another; how they act up to one another; how they work up a point and climax together. Think of all this, and think at the same time that they have been *taught* all that. There is such an individual as the stage manager, who drills the people on the stage into their positions, which cannot be altered after they are finally settled. There is the author, who marks stage directions in the manuscript (or "script," to make it more professional, for we take it you are a real amateur by this time and have already shaved off your moustache), and who generally superintends the rehearsals. There is a great deal to be learnt from the front of the house, and if you are a thoroughbred amateur you will go to the theatre and see every show you can. In this way you will become acquainted with the business of the stage. In the meantime, however, let us exchange our ideas upon the subject, and first let us consider the very indispensable element in acting, not only on the stage but off it, viz., gesture and deportment. We are not going to lay down

any hard and fast rules here. That is for the class, and as you are not in class we will simply give our general views upon the subject.

After you have learnt to stand perfectly quiet and at ease, always remembering that true ease in standing

"comes from art, not chance,

As those move easiest who have learnt to dance";

and not to appear "a guy," the next important step to be taken by the student of elocution (yes, my friend, you must learn elocution, for it does teach us these things) is to make yourself aware of the best manner of moving the limbs about gracefully, and in accordance with the rules of gesture, for, after all, there are rules of gesture. There are those peculiar and harmless individuals who have said that gesture cannot be taught. These extraordinary mental phenomena may possibly, and in all probability do, find a physical difficulty in moving their limbs gracefully, but, provided that you suffer from no bodily malformation, we cannot imagine what there is to prevent you using your hands, arms, and body, as Nature intended that you should. In applying yourself to the subject, which everyone might do with advantage, you will do well to keep in mind that all that is expected of you is to be natural. And here is just the difficulty. It is like the fond mother who told her little boy to walk naturally, to which request the child answered: "But I can't mamma, you must show me!" And she had to show him. And you, if you wish to learn gesture, will have to be shown too. As to how you should be shown is quite another matter. We have our opinions upon this subject, which differ

greatly from those of other people. But it would never do if everybody was of the same opinion. There would then be no argument, and without argument how would we get on? But to continue with the gesture. No matter what your action may be, if it is natural and significant you can safely consider it good. But good is not excellent, perfect, nor anything but good, which is only so-so. There is such a thing as improving natural motion, and, as a naturally good singer can be made to excel, so also good inherent qualities in any other direction may, and ought to be, cultivated to the best possible advantage. We can never understand why a naturally gifted person neglects to cultivate the good qualities of which he or she may be possessed. It is both unjust to the individual and to Nature herself, who—to quote a musty, but pertinent, expression—“helps those who help themselves.” It is often interesting and instructive to watch the gesture or action of two or more persons speaking without knowing or understanding what they are saying. It is curious to notice how one of them may use more action than the other, and yet not appearing to convey much to his advantage. We can on such occasions distinguish one who does not use much action, and yet who seems to make himself understood, and appears to be listened to with more attention than another. This example illustrates an important point. Never use too much gesture; a preponderance or superfluity of action does not mean strength; it rather signifies weakness and want of judgment upon the part of the speaker or actor. Be sparing with your movements, and, when they are re-

quired, bring them in with promptness and distinction. Shakespeare has said: "Suit the action to the word, and the word to the action." That looks very well on paper, but you watch anyone speaking who tries to follow out that advice; he will bring down a blow upon every word, and when he comes to emphasise any particular word, or convey any particular and definite meaning, he will be unable, because too much action means no action at all. Suit the action rather to the "idea," and by so doing you will run a less chance of overstepping the modesty of Nature. Nothing has tended so much to deprive actors and reciters of natural strength than a slavish attention to this rule. There is nothing more pleasing than a man or woman on the stage who has himself or herself perfectly under control, and what we believe distinguished Charles Kean was this rare gift of using gesture with discrimination. By means of his movements and expression, he could, we are told, act with such power that it was immaterial whether he articulated a word. The criticisms which we have, demonstrate that Kean had a bad voice and an insignificant person. Yet who could approach his Othello? The Count de Soligny—whose letters on England, although not well-known, are among the most remarkable of their kind—when writing of this wonderful actor, makes use of the following expression when criticising Kean's great masterpiece: "His eyes glare; his teeth grind against each other; his voice is hoarse and broken; his hands clench and open alternately, as if they were revelling in the blood of his enemy, and his whole frame seems to have imbibed the will and the

powers of a demon." In this description we have an admirable portrait of how the passion of the Moor should be presented. But apart from that, we can clearly understand how action must accompany articulation. The two are kindred in this matter, and go together to assist each other; the former, however, being subordinate in its signification to the other; but still the two must harmonise and keep time, as it were, and mutually assist each other in the ultimate attainment of the object of their endeavours. Besides the action of the limbs, which is in itself powerful, there is also another, and equally strong, important feature, namely, facial expression. There is nothing so truly ridiculous as to see a person gyrating on or off the stage who does so without feeling, or seeming to feel, what he is saying. If a man feels what he is saying, he will show it in his face, in his voice, and, above all, in his gestures. He must, if he be an actor or reciter, sink himself, for the time being, heart and soul into the character he is representing. If he can do so successfully, he has every right to be called a good actor or a good elocutionist. If he cannot, he is simply a mouthing, ranting, grotesque magpie, who apes the character, but who does not do it. The actor whom we cannot recognise in his different impersonations on the stage is unquestionably a conscientious actor; and he who can be discovered in the first words he speaks is only a theatrical parrot, who gets off words by rote, and repeats them with as much force and intelligence as that species of the feathered tribe generally succeeds in doing. Then, what is acting and what is elocution? In these days of stage monstrosities

the question is, indeed, difficult to answer, for we see and hear such extraordinary contortionists that one is bewildered with a medley almost inconceivable in its chaotic state of rant and roar. An actor must be human. He must have human interests and desires. He must be capable of loving, hating and despising. All the passions and emotions are his, and should be under his immediate control. He should be able to depict all the passions almost in the very turn of his eye. "There is rhetoric in the eye," and as that feature is the most expressive, it is there the actor should centre most of his resources of power, sorrow, rapture, love, hate. We are told that Miss O'Neil, who was a contemporary of Kean, was, or rather her expression was, composed of smiles and tears. Facial expression, then, plays a distinct part in the actor's art, and without it the actor is deficient in one of the chief characteristics which give him distinction and genius. All this, then, constitutes gesture, and gesture means and includes all this; and all this the student of the drama, the elocutionist, the amateur and the professional actor should understand.

Sir Henry Irving was once asked by an aspirant after Thespian honours what he was to do in order to learn how to become an elocutionist. "Place yourself under a good master," said the popular actor. There is no doubt that this is sound advice, and given after years of experience; but there is something further, still more important to one anxious to acquire the rudiments of elocution and acting. Without unremitting and careful practice you cannot become proficient. All the lecturing and examples that could be placed before the student will not

be of the slightest avail unless he is prepared to give daily attention to the cultivation of the subject. There may be those who will make more progress than others, and there are those who will appear to make no headway at all. But all will gain some good from the study if it be only for the sake of gaining confidence in society, and learning how to walk and talk with propriety and self-possession. The young amateur actor and student of elocution must be careful, in his application to the study, to go the right way about learning the subject; otherwise he may acquire a false system of speech and action which may do more harm than good. While on the point of gesture, we would advise all students to cease studying gesture from books and illustrations; gesture must be *vivâ voce* in its explanation, and, what is more, it must be taught by an experienced and naturally gifted teacher. Many persons, as we have already stated, assert that gesture cannot be taught; but experience has shown us that it is only by proper teaching that it is cultivated at all and brought into a state of perfection. Always recollect that a naturally gifted person is rarely so good, if not taught, as one possessing moderate ability, but who has received the advantage of expert tuition. Perhaps the best example of what gesture is in its good and bad aspects, is the amateur actor and the professional. Contrast the amateur stage with the professional, and what do we find? Want of grace and ease to begin with. Amateurs, as a rule, but not always, have their words off and can pronounce them in that manner of indifference which distinguish their utterances; but it is in acting we find them principally deficient. They occasionally

throw in a sweep or two, seldom significant, often inappropriate, and, if it be a love scene that is being maltreated, the individual impersonating Romeo almost invariably throws himself, like a sack of coals, on to the *wrong* knee. Nearly every amateur actor and every student of elocution whom we have instructed, and some people calling themselves professionals, were at first ignorant of the rule relating to this stage position. [The rule is, when kneeling on the stage, lower the body on to the limb which is further from the audience.] Plenty of people find a difficulty in kneeling, or dropping gracefully on to the knee, without toppling over, and we remember a young lady, who had undertaken to play a part which demanded this facility, being compelled to relinquish the task owing to her inability to sustain her equilibrium (and the gravity of the audience) at this critical moment.

As a general rule, you should not, unless absolutely compelled, turn your back upon the front of the house. We must confess a great number of professionals ignore this, but then they have usually something in the matter of dress and headgear to display, and a good back view is often desirable to give the critical element an opportunity of seeing a well-shaped back and pair of shoulders. It must also be remarked that women are more guilty in this respect than men, because they have points to show off which men have not.

A side face, too, is objectionable, as the full expression is not obtained, which can only be seen in the three-quarter and the full, but seldom, if ever, in the profile. When walking off the stage you have to carry the interest and goodwill of the audience with you, and

as this has to be sustained from the moment you step before them, it should be your all-absorbing duty to leave a good impression, and make an agreeable exit. Above all things, don't finish your lines in the centre of the stage, and then walk off, probably to find yourself confronted with a dummy door, and, to your disgust and the merriment of the audience, that you have to walk across the boards, sometimes to be met by somebody coming in, when a collision is inevitable. We have witnessed some most laughable mistakes of this nature, which occasionally, unfortunately, occur at a most pathetic portion of the piece, just when the character thinks he is making a stroke of good business; the end, perhaps, of one of those grand speeches in which actors delight so much to indulge. Audiences, or a particular portion of them, are, as a rule, on the look-out for anything to gey, and when an opportunity does occur they are not slow to take advantage of it. These are incidents familiar to all theatre-goers, and are by no means confined to amateurs. They should be carefully and studiously guarded against, for once a man or woman loses his or her head on the stage, there is nothing too absurd to follow. Presence of mind and a keen look-out for accidents on the stage, only comes after years of experience and study; its practice distinguishes the real actor; its want, the trembling and over-ambitious amateur, who, while thinking of the present, loses all anticipation for the future. We once witnessed a performance by an amateur club in which an actor referred to a picture which must have been situated, according to his gestures, somewhere

near the limelight, but which, in reality, was behind his back. An eminent professional, while once playing *Hamlet*, again made a similar error, and instead of looking "upon this picture and upon this," the Queen was compelled to follow his action, which pointed to a gaping exit. Not long ago an actor came upon the stage without his "property," which in this case was a paper in the shape of a will. Having intimated in a whisper to his fellow player what he had done, or rather forgotten to do, the latter replied aloud with astonishing alacrity: "Never mind, sir; I know all about that will." A scene not intended for performance was accordingly avoided; but such presence of mind is a rarity, and such an occasion, which is by no means exceptional, is generally followed by confusion on the stage and all sorts of abuse behind the scenes, to the unfortunate pilgarlic who committed no other wrong than that of causing rounds of laughter, and cat-calls from the "gods." These experiences are interesting, but very painful to those who have created them. They serve, however, to show us how very essential it is to have complete control over all our resources when appearing before an audience.

The amateur actor has many things to learn and many things also, perhaps, to unlearn before he can confidently place himself upon the stage, even for the amusement of his friends. It is only fair to them that if he does appear, and if they are present, he should conduct himself to the best possible advantage. Much good may be done by amateur theatricals if they are done circumspectly and with an anxiety to make the

best impression. There is a wide field open for their operations in the numerous charities which may be assisted by their co-operation. Besides this, the zealous student may gain experience which will be useful if he ever "adopt the stage as a profession." Certain it is that the professional stage is overcrowded, but what walk in life is not blocked by the number of candidates who are competitors for success? Your ability will be recognised, if you have any, but don't be too ready to place confidence in the friendly approval and encouragement of friends, who may be influenced by personal feelings. The best course is to go to a teacher of elocution, who will give you impartial advice, and, if he understands his business, assist you in your studies. In the selection of an elocution instructor you will do well to exercise discrimination, and ascertain if he or she really is a *bonâ-fide* teacher, or only a teacher by the mere stress of circumstances. It is often the case, when a man or a woman fails at everything else, they purchase a cane and a copy-book and set up as teachers. The bogus agent is another lady or gentleman to be guarded against. It will, however, be time enough to consider these individuals when you have some ability to test, and then, if you have any common sense and judgment, you will be able to select a qualified teacher for yourself.

The average student will experience his greatest difficulty in the study and acquirement of gesture. This is, in fact, the stumbling-block *par excellence* with students. It will depend greatly upon the teacher's, we were going to write "experience," but "tact" con-

veys our meaning better. There are teachers in London of considerable experience—we have one especially in our mind's eye—who are incapable, absolutely, of teaching the rudiments of gesture. We say absolutely because they are unfitted by nature for the task. We have watched and noted various teachers in London, and have had their pupils, and, for the life of them, they could neither explain why or how gesture was to be done, and the pupils were, of course, hopelessly at sea. Teaching gesture by imitation is, perhaps, in an elocutionary sense, the greatest crime a teacher can commit. To tell a student to do a particular gesture in a particular way is to destroy at once his or her individuality and originality. No two people do anything alike. Individualities are entirely dissimilar. People are dissimilar in every respect—in handwriting, walk, speech, voice, accent, thought and, in fact, in everything. They are also different in the way they conceive and display their emotions, and, as gesture is the outcome of emotion, it must be different in different individuals. To tell a student to wait for a particular word before raising the hand to denote emphasis is as absurd as to tell him to commence thinking of anything at a certain point. No; there is such a thing as individuality, and this should not be interfered with; if so, the pupil is only a copy of the teacher, and that teacher may be very unworthy of being copied. There are certain arbitrary rules which deserve to be carefully examined and applied, but here rule-of-thumb must end.

We would willingly go into the discussion of gesture here, but as it is a subject which cannot be adequately

treated in a limited article like the present, we must content ourselves with what has already been said. Gesture and its application—it is only fair and honest to admit—is extremely difficult, and, we believe, there are those people who cannot master it. Here, however, we must conclude. Our views upon this subject are pretty well known by those who take any interest in it; but we hope in the future to contribute a work upon gesture, which, we think, will not be altogether without value.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAW OF COPYRIGHT IN ITS RELATION TO DRAMATIC WORKS, BY EDMOND BROWNE, B.L.

THE dramatic author should be duly acquainted with all the ins and outs of the law of copyright as it affects the legal guardianship of his "property." By having a knowledge of this department of law, he will be less likely to blunder and better able to detect blunder in others. The law of copyright is fearfully complicated, in some cases hopelessly abstruse; but we shall endeavour to make the matter as clear and as understandable as possible. First, to understand the meaning of the term "Copyright," according to Lord Mansfield's definition, is "an incorporeal right to the *sole* printing and publishing of somewhat intellectual communicated by letters"; the right "to print a set of intellectual ideas or modes of thinking communicated in a set of words and sentences and modes of expression"; "it is detached from the manuscript or any other physical existence whatsoever." The author of these ideas may claim them as his own property, and, under certain circumstances, as we shall see, can claim compensation if his property is stolen or used in such a way that he is debarred from reaping any benefit from it, either pecuniary or otherwise. An author may have the right of ownership before the publication of his literary work

as well as after that publication. He has the right to prevent others from publishing it, either in his or their names. He has also the right, after publication, of restricting the number of copies published or printed, and of restraining others from publishing and printing from those copies. But the last "right" is more liable to be violated than the others.

A "dramatic piece" (with which, in this article, we have most to do) signifies, "Every tragedy, comedy, play, opera, farce, or other scenic, musical or dramatic entertainment," and copyright, in reference to dramatic pieces and musical compositions, means the sole right of public representation or performance. The copyright of a dramatic piece or musical composition extends for forty-two years after its first performance, which is equivalent to the first publication of a book. The fact of a dramatic piece being printed in book form does not give anybody, other than the author, the right of producing, performing, or causing to be performed his play or dramatic composition. The author's, or his assign's, consent must be obtained before any performance of his work can be given. Otherwise those responsible for such performance are liable to a penalty of forty shillings, the forfeiture of all the receipts, benefits or advantages of the performance. A musical composition published after August 10th, 1882, which disallows public performance should have that fact stated and printed upon the title-page.

A dramatic, musical or other author should be careful to register his work, or works, at Stationers' Hall, in accordance with the Act of 1842. This should be

done whether the work is in manuscript, typewritten or print. The author will have to enter the date and place of first publication or representation, if the work be not printed and published, but is only in manuscript; also his own address. The fee for this is five shillings.

An author cannot sue or proceed for any infringement before registration. The fact of a book being in print is sufficient to justify ownership and the penalties attached to piracy; but, should the book be not registered, the author cannot sue or proceed for infringement.

It is not an infringement of the copyright of a novel to dramatise it for public performance or representation; but should a person multiply copies of the play, or dramatised version, he will be liable. Anyone who dramatised a novel like Rider Haggard's "Dawn," for example, would be liable, because he would necessarily be compelled to make several copies for the different actors who would be employed in giving it representation.

A copy of all books or plays must, in compliance with the Act of 1842, be sent to the British Museum, the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the Public Library at Cambridge, the Library of the Faculty of Advocates at Edinburgh, and the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

A point in the law of copyright, or rather in common law in its bearing on copyright, is the fact that if you employ another man, say at a weekly salary, to write you a play or adapt a play for your use and benefit, that play is no more yours than *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. Even if you gave a literary or dramatic hack

one hundred pounds for a play, it is his and not yours—although he was your employé, your servant, and having done his work, you may have thought it yours. But no; unless he makes an assignment in writing to you, giving up all claim to the composition or adaptation as the case may be, he is at liberty to claim author's fees as if he were an ordinary author. The case is altered, however, where the manager obtains the assistance of the author to revise the play, and so long as he does not do all the writing, and so long as the manager has his finger in the pie, the author can claim only the stipulated sum for his portion of the work, which work is thus the property of the manager or whoever employed the author.

The author of a play or a novel, or, indeed, of any book, must give it no title that has already been used. Nor is he at liberty to give an imitation, whether gauzy or not. The public must not be deceived, and that is the main point. When the deception of the public is being practised, the law should promptly step in. To gull the public to go and see a play which they are led to believe is quite another, is as wrong as to delude them that it is by an author different to the real and *bonâ-fide* author and composer. The composer of a play might call it *His Excellency*, but the author of an opera could not, because it would be an atrocious means of deception.

Although hardly a matter of legal discussion, still it might possibly lead to one in the Courts, any attempt to caricature notabilities should be avoided. The practice has received the sanction of public approval, but the people themselves do not like it, and it is anything but good taste. The Censor will generally put his pencil

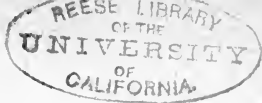
through anything liable to be regarded as a personal insult upon public men and institutions; sometimes, however, he neglects to do so till these public people request him. He should, however, exercise his censorship before being asked at all.

The relations which exist between Great Britain and America concerning the law of copyright are somewhat complicated, and it would be requisite that you understood something of law, before the different points at issue could be really intelligibly explained. There are, however, a few points which we select from the many which will be of sufficient value and use to the author, and which, if he rightly understands them, will enable him to meet the majority of cases in which he is concerned. The following extract from Morgan's "Law of Literature," an American work, gives us an inkling into the legal state of things as they exist between the two countries. "It appears, first, that an alien dramatic author in the United States, practically and in effect, receives precisely the same protection in his literary property as the citizen can receive in his; and secondly, that, by neglecting to comply with our copyright laws" (American mind), "the alien dramatic author can actually enjoy greater privileges of protection in his literary property than he could by complying with them."

Your consent must be obtained for an American production of your play, unless you print it in book form. Mr. S. Theyre Smith has written a well-known piece, called *A Happy Pair*. It was produced in America after he had it printed in book form, but,

of course, he could obtain no redress. The American version is certainly different from the original, but there can be no doubt whence it came. The author, Mr. Smith, was naturally indignant, but he could do nothing to bring the adapter "to justice." He gives the following footnote in his printed book: "The author wishes it to be distinctly understood that *A Happy Pair*, as published in New York by Mr. Dewitt, is a mere American adaptation of the present piece. The incidents generally are closely followed, but the dialogue is marred and mangled in so shameless a fashion, that it becomes a question which is the more unjustifiable, the theft of the title and incidents, or the libel upon the author implied in putting his name upon the title-page." Not only is the play performed, but copies of it are sold, and the author cannot claim any damages. There is, however, a very advisable way of meeting the difficulty. The English author can sell out all his rights to the American for a round sum, and in this way avoid all confusion and misunderstanding. The English author may employ the services of anyone in the United States who will collect his fees and send them to him in the usual way. The most preferable method, we think, is to sell out the rights altogether if the author can get a good price for his work; except, however, in such cases where the English author is well known and does not mind going to the expense of taking a trip over to the States to uphold his rights. But authors of small pieces and farces would be doing better by selling out altogether.

Should a play be performed first in America, it can



be afterwards played here, and, in order to protect themselves from this kind of robbery, for that is what it is pure and simple, the play is often produced first in England and a few nights after in America. This saves the copyright for the author.

When a play is written and intended for production, a copy (we recommend a type-written copy) should be sent to the "Censor" (or "Examiner of Plays" as he is officially known), "H.M. Household, St. James's Place." A fee of one guinea if the play is in one act, and two guineas if in more than one act, should accompany the copy. The signature of the manager, and the name of the theatre at which it is to be produced, should, with the proposed date of production, be also stated. Usually within seven days the Lord Chamberlain's license is received at the theatre. If, on the contrary, the Censor does not write after seven days, it may be taken that there is nothing objectionable (or, rather, he has seen nothing objectionable) in the play.

Since the passing of the American Copyright Bill, authors, and especially those of the first class, have printed and published their plays in book form. Before the passing of this Bill, there was the fear of the American managers getting a copy, and using it in America and paying no fees. Now all that is changed; and if an author's play is refused at all the theatres and by all the managers in London, he may yet have the satisfaction (if there is any satisfaction in it) of printing and publishing his play and sending it to his friends and relatives, who, for the most part, will probably only read the title-page.

As to whether any portion of a copyright play which is published in book form (like Mr. Pinero's and Mr. Jones's) can be *recited* in public, either by one or two (as in taking a scene between two or more characters), we have no authority for giving the law upon the point. But we think there could be little difficulty, if the author wished, in showing that such reciting of his plays, or only part of them, was an infringement of the copyright, especially if the play, or a portion of it, was recited in a public theatre and money was charged for admission.

This, we believe, is all the legal matter which the author of plays need understand. Although the law may appear, upon a first reading, to be hopelessly involved, that will be no excuse for the one who breaks it. The substance of it, as it affects the playwright, is simple enough, and he has no valid reason for either infringing it himself or permitting its infringement in others.

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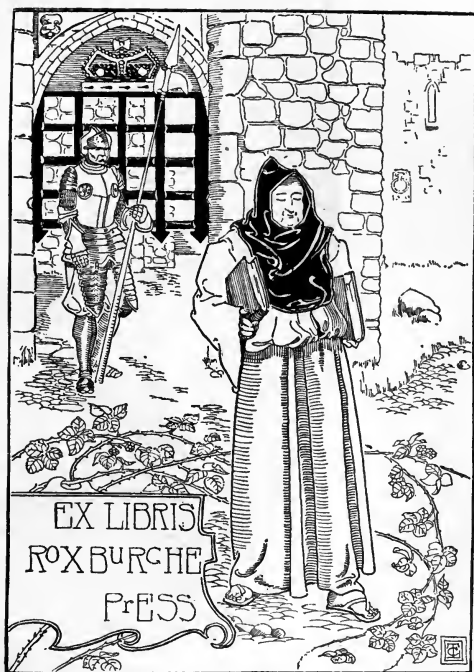
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